A DOORWAY IN FAIRYLAND

This selection of fairy-tales is reprinted from the following original editions, now out of print :

A Farm in Fairyland	(1894)
The House of Joy	(1895)
The Field of Clover	(1898)
The Blue Moon	(1904)

A DOORWAY IN FAIRYLAND

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THE BLUE MOON

NILLYWILL and Hands-pansy were the most unimportant and happy pair of lovers the world has ever gained or lost. With them it had been a case of love at first blindness since the day when they had tumbled into each other's arms in the same cradle. And Hands-pansy, when he first saw her, did not discover that Nillywill was a real princess hiding her birthright in the home of a poor peasant; nor did Nillywill, when she first saw Hands, see in him the baby-beginnings of the most honest and good heart that ever sprang out of poverty and humble parentage. So from her end of their little crib she kicked him with her royal rosy toes, and he from his kicked back and laughed: and thus, as you hear, at first blindness they fell head over ears in love with one another.

Nothing could undo that; for day by day earth and sun and wind came to rub it in deeper, and water could not wash it off. So when they had been seven years together there could be no doubt that they felt as if they had been made for each other in heaven. And then something very big and sad came to pass; for one day Nillywill had to leave off being a peasant child and become a princess once more. People very grand and grown-up came to the woodside where she flowered so gaily, and caught her by the golden hair of her head and pulled her up by her dear little roots, and carried her quite away from Hands-pansy to a place she had never

been in before. They put her into a large palace, with woods and terraces and landscape gardens on all sides of it; and there she sat crying and pale, saying that she wanted to be taken back to Hands-pansy and grow up and marry him, though he was but the poor peasant boy he had always been.

Those that had charge of Nillywill in her high station talked wisely, telling her to forget him. "For," said they, "such a thing as a princess marrying a peasant boy can only happen once in a blue moon!"

When she heard that, Nillywill began every night to watch the moon rise, hoping some evening to see it grow up like a blue flower against the dusk and shake down her wish to her like a bee out of its deep bosom.

But night by night, silver, or ruddy, or primrose, it lit a place for itself in the heavens; and years went by, bringing the Princess no nearer to her desire to find room for Hands-pansy amid the splendours of her throne.

She knew that he was five thousand miles away and had only wooden peasant shoes to walk in; and when she begged that she might once more have sight of him, her whole court, with the greatest utterable politeness, cried "No!"

The Princess's memory sang to her of him in a thousand tunes, like woodland birds carolling; but it was within the cage which men call a crown that her thoughts moved, fluttering to be out of it and free.

So time went on, and Nillywill had entered gently into sweet womanhood—the comeliest princess that

ever dropped a tear ; and all she could do for love was to fill her garden with dark-eyes pansies, and walk among their humble upturned faces which reminded her so well of her dear Hands—Hands who was a long five thousand miles away. "And, oh!" she sighed, watching for the blue moon to rise, "when will it come and make me at one with all my wish?"

Looking up, she used to wonder what went on there. She and Hands had stolen into the woods, when children together, and watched the small earth-fairies at play, and had seen them, when the moon was full, lift up their arms to it, making, perhaps, signals of greeting to far-off moon-brothers. So she thought to herself, "What kind are the fairies up there, and who is the greatest moon-fairy of all who makes the blue moon rise and bring good-will to the sad wishers of the human race? Is it," thought Nillywill, "the moon-fairy who then opens its heart and brings down healing therefrom to the lovers of earth?"

And now, as happens to all those who are captives of a crown, Nillywill learned that she must wed with one of her own rank who was a stranger to her save for his name and his renown as the lord of a neighbouring country ; there was no help for her, since she was a princess, but she must wed according to the claims of her station. When she heard of it, she went at nightfall to her pansies, all lying in their beds, and told them of her grief. They, awakened by her tears, lifted up their grave eyes and looked at her.

"Do you not hear?" said they.

"Hear what?" asked the Princess.

"We are low in the ground: we hear!" said the pansies. "Stoop down your head and listen!"

The Princess let her head go to the ground; and "click, click," she heard wooden shoes coming along the road. She ran to the gate, and there was Hands, tall and lean, dressed as a poor peasant, with a bundle tied up in a blue cotton handkerchief across his shoulder, and five thousand miles trodden to nothing by the faithful tramping of his old wooden shoes.

"Oh, the blue moon, the blue moon!" cried the Princess; and running down the road, she threw herself into his arms.

How happy and proud they were of each other! He, because she remembered him and knew him so well by the sight of his face and the sound of his feet after all these years; and she, because he had come all that way in a pair of wooden shoes, just as he was, and had not been afraid that she would be ashamed to know him again.

"I am so hungry!" said Hands, when he and Nillywill had done kissing each other. And when Nillywill heard that, she brought him into the palace through the pansies by her own private way; then with her own hands she set food before him, and made him eat. Hands, looking at her, said, "You are quite as beautiful as I thought you would be!"

"And you—so are you!" she answered, laughing and clapping her hands. And "Oh, the blue moon," she cried—"surely the blue moon must rise to-night!"

Low down in the west the new moon, leaning on

its side, rocked and turned softly in its sleep; and there, facing the earth through the cleared night, the blue moon hung like a burning grape against the sky. Like the heart of a sapphire laid open, the air flushed and purpled to a deeper shade. The wind drew in its breath close and hushed, till not a leaf quaked in the boughs; and the sea that lay out west gathered its waves together softly to its heart, and let the heave of its tide fall wholly to slumber. Round-eyed, the stars looked at themselves in the charmed water, while in a luminous azure flood the light of the blue moon flowed abroad.

Under the light of many tapers within drawn curtains of tapestry, and feasting her eyes upon the happiness of Hands, the Princess felt the change that had entranced the outer world. "I feel," she said, "I do not know how—as if the palace were standing siege. Come out where we can breathe the fresh air!"

The light of the tapers grew ghostly and dim, as, parting the thick hangings of the window, they stepped into the night.

"The blue moon!" cried Nillywill to her heart; "oh, Hands, it is the blue moon!"

All the world seemed carved out of blue stone; trees with stems dark-veined as marble rose up to give rest to boughs which drooped the altered hues of their foliage like the feathers of peacocks at roost. Jewel within jewel they burned through every shade from beryl to onyx. The white blossoms of a cherry-tree had become changed into turquoise, and the tossing spray of a fountain as it drifted and swung was like a column of blue fire. Where a long

inlet of sea reached in and touched the feet of the hanging gardens the stars showed like glow-worms, emerald in a floor of amethyst.

There was no motion abroad, nor sound: even the voice of the nightingale was stilled, because the passion of his desire had become visible before his eyes.

"Once in a blue moon!" said Nillywill, waiting for her dream to become altogether true. "Let us go now," she said, "where I can put away my crown! To-night has brought you to me, and the blue moon has come for us: let us go!"

"Where shall we go?" asked Hands.

"As far as we can," cried Nillywill. "Suppose to the blue moon! To-night it seems as if one might tread on water or air. Yonder across the sea, with the stars for stepping-stones, we might get to the blue moon as it sets into the waves."

But as they went through the deep alleys of the garden that led down to the shore they came to a sight more wonderful than anything they had yet seen.

Before them, facing toward the sea, stood two great reindeer, their high horns reaching to the overhead boughs; and behind them lay a sledge, long and with deep sides like the sides of a ship. All blue they seemed in that strange light.

There, too, but nearer to hand, was the moon-fay himself waiting—a great figure of lofty stature, clad in furs of blue fox-skin, and with heron's wings fastened above the flaps of his hood; and these lifted themselves and clapped as Hands and the Princess drew near.

"Are you coming to the blue moon?" called the fay, and his voice whistled and shrilled to them like the voice of a wind.

Hands-pansy gave back answer stoutly: "Yes, yes, we are coming!" And indeed what better could he say?

"But," cried Nillywill, holding back for a moment, "what will the blue moon do for us?"

"Once you are there," answered the moon-fay, "you can have your wish and your heart's desire; but only once in a blue moon can you have it. Are you coming?"

"We are coming!" cried Nillywill. "Oh, let us make haste!"

"Tread softly," whispered the moon-fay, "and stoop well under these boughs, for if anything awakes to behold the blue moon, the memory of it can never die. On earth only the nightingale of all living things has beheld a blue moon; and the triumph and pain of that memory wakens him ever since to sing all night long. Tread softly, lest others waken and learn to cry after us; for we in the blue moon have our sleep troubled by those who cry for a blue moon to return." He looked towards Nillywill, and smiled with friendly eyes. "Come!" he said again, and all at once they had leapt upon the sledge, and the reindeer were running fast down towards the sea.

The blue moon was resting with its lower rim upon the waters. At that sight, before they were clear of the avenues of the garden, one of the reindeer tossed up his great branching horns and snorted aloud for joy. With a soft stir in the thick boughs

overhead, a bird with a great trail of feathers moved upon its perch.

The sledge, gliding from land, passed out over the smoothed waters, running swiftly as upon ice; and the reflection of the stars shone up like glow-worms as Nillywill and Hands-pansy, in the moon-fay's company, sped away along its bright surface.

The still air whistled through the reindeers' horns; so fast they went that the trees and the hanging gardens and the palace walls melted away from view like wreaths of smoke. Sky and sea became one magic sapphire drawing them in towards the centre of its life, to the heart of the blue moon itself.

When the blue moon had set below the sea, then far behind them upon the land they had left the leaves rustled and drew sharply together, shuddering to get rid of the stony stillness, and the magic hues in which they had been dyed; and again the nightingale broke out into passionate triumph and complaint.

Then also, from the bough which the reindeer had brushed with its horns, a peacock threw back its head and cried in harsh lamentation, having no sweet voice wherewith to acclaim its prize. And so ever since it cries, as it goes up into the boughs to roost, because it shares with the nightingale its grief for the memory of departed beauty which never returns to earth save once in a blue moon.

But Nillywill and Hands-pansy, living together in the blue moon, look back upon the world, if now and then they choose to remember, without any longing for it or sorrow.

THE WISHING-POT

TULIP was the son of a poor but prudent mother; from the moment of his birth she had trained him to count ten before ever he wanted or asked for anything. An otherwise reckless youth, he acquired an intrinsic value through the practice of this habit. Only once, just as he was reaching, but had not quite reached, years of discretion, did his habit of precaution fail him; and this same failure became in the end the opening of his fortunes.

Bathing one day in the river, to whose banks the woods ran down in steep terraces, he heard a voice come singing along one of the upper slopes; and looking up under the boughs of cedar and sycamore, he saw a pair of green feet go dancing by, up and down like grasshoppers on the prance.

There was such rhythm in them, and such sweetness in the voice, that his heart was out of him before he could harness it to the number ten, and he came out of the water the most natural and forlorn of lovers.

Before he was dressed the green feet and the voice were gone, and before he got home his health and his appetite seemed to have gone also. He pined industriously from day to day, and spent all his hours in searching among the woods by the river side for his lady of the dear green feet. He did not know so much as the size or colour of her face; the sound of her voice alone, and the running up and

down of her feet, had, as he told his mother, "decimated his affections."

In his trouble he could think of only one possible remedy, and that he counted well over, knowing its risk. Away in the loneliest part of the forest there lived a wise woman, to whom, now and then, folk went for help when everything else had failed them. So he had heard tell of a certain Wishing-Pot that was hers in which people might see the thing they desired most, and into which for a fee she allowed lovers and other poor fools of fortune to look. One thing, however, was told against the virtues of this Wishing-Pot, that though many had had a sight of it, and their wishes revealed to them therein, others had gone and had never again returned to their homes, but had vanished altogether from men's sight, nor had any news ever been heard of them after. There were some wise folk who held that they had only gone elsewhere to seek the fortune that the Wishing-Pot had shown to them. Nevertheless, for the most part, the wise woman and her Wishing-Pot had an ill name in that neighbourhood.

To a lover's heart risk gives value; so one fine morning Tulip kissed his mother, counted ten, and set out for the woods.

Towards evening he came to the house of the witch and knocked at the door. "Good mother," said he, when she opened to him, "I have brought you the fee to buy myself a wish over the Wishing-Pot." "Ay, surely," answered the crone, and drew him in.

In one corner of the room stood a great crystal bowl. Nearly round it was, and had a small opening

at the top, to which a man might place his eye and look in. To Tulip, as he looked at it, it seemed all coloured fires and falling stars, and a soft crackling sound came from it, as though heat burned in its veins. It threw long shapes and lustres upon the walls, and within innumerable things writhed, and ran, and whiffed in the floating of its vapours.

"You may have two wishes," said the old witch, "a one and a two." And she said the spell that undid the secret of the Pot to the wisher.

Then Tulip bent down his head and looked in, counting softly to himself, and at ten, he let the wish go to his lady of the dear green feet.

The colours changed and sprang, as though stirred and fed with fresh fuel; and down in the depths of the Wishing-Pot he saw the feet of his Beloved go by in twinkling green slippers.

As soon as he saw that he began counting ten in great haste for the second wish. "O to be inside the Wishing-Pot with her!" was his thought now. He had got to nine, and the wish was almost on his tongue, when he caught sight of the old woman's eye looking at him. And the eye had become like a large green spider, with great long limbs that kept clutching up and out again!

His heart queegled to a jelly at the sight; but the green feet lured him so, that he still thought how to get to them and yet be safe. Surely, to be in the Wishing-Pot and out by the sound of the next Angelus became the shape of his wish. He shut his eyes, cried ten upon the venture, and was in the Wishing-Pot!

The little green feet were trebling over the glass

with a sound like running water; and he himself began running at full speed, shot off into the Wishing-Pot like a pellet from a pop-gun. Nothing could he see of his dear but her wee green feet. But above them as they ran he heard showery laughter, and he knew that his lady was there before him, though invisible to the eye.

The Pot, now he was in it, seemed bigger than the biggest dome in the world; to run all round it took him two or three minutes. Away in the centre of its base stood a great opal knob, like the axle to a wheel round which he and the green feet kept circling.

However much he wished and wished, the green feet still kept their distance, for now he was *in* the Wishing-Pot wishes availed him nothing. The green feet flew faster than his; the light laugh rang further and further away; right across to the other side of the hall his lady had passed from him now.

The magic fires of the crystal leaped and crackled under his tread; now it seemed as if his feet ran on a green lawn, out of which broke crocuses and daffodils, and now roses reddened in the track, and now the purple of grapes spurted across the path like spilled wine. The sound of the green feet and the running of overhead laughter, as they distanced him in front, came nearer and nearer behind him from across the hall. He felt that he must follow and not turn, however beaten he might be.

Presently a voice, that he knew was his Beloved's, cried,—

> "Heart that would have me must hatch me!
> Feet that would find me must catch me!
> Man that would mate me must match me!"

Oh, how ? wondered spent feet, and failing heart, and reeling brain. He stumbled slower and slower in the race, till presently with quick innumerable patterings the green feet grew closer, and were overtaking him from the rear.

Warm breath was in his hair,—lips and a hand ; he turned, open armed, to snatch the mischievous morsel, but all that he clasped was a gust of air ; and he saw the green feet scudding out and away on a fresh start before him.

Again, with laughter, the voice cried,—

> " Lap for lap you must wind me :
> Equal, before you can find me !
> You are a lap behind me ! "

Where they raced the surface of the glass sloped slightly to the upward rise of its walls ; Tulip shifted his ground, and ran where the footing was leveller towards the centre, and the circle began to go smaller. So he began to gain, till the green slippers, seeing how the advantage had come about, shifted also in their turn.

Thus they ran on ; there were no inner posts to mark the course, only the great opal standing in the centre of all formed the pivot of the race, and round and round it, a great way off, they ran.

All at once a big thought came into Tulip's head ; he waited not to count ten, but, before Green Slippers knew what he was after, he had reached the opal centre, and was circling it. Then quickly all the laughter stopped ; the green feet came twinkling sixteen to the dozen, so as to get round the post before him and away.

One lap, he was before her ; two laps, he turned

again to her coming, and found her falling into his arms. She blossomed into sight at his touch : from top to toe she was there ! All rosy and alive he had her in his clasp, laughing, crying, clinging, yet struggling to be free. She made a most endless handful, till Tulip had caught her by the hair and kissed her between the eyes.

All round and overhead the magic crystal reared up arches of fire, to a roof that dropped like rain, while Tulip and his prize sank down exhausted on the great hub of opal to rest. As he touched it all the secret wonders of the Wishing-Pot were opened and revealed to his gaze.

Crowds and crowds of faces were what he most saw ; everywhere that he turned he saw old friends and neighbours who, he thought, had been dead and gone, looking sadly, and shaking long sorrowful faces at him. " You here too, Tulip ? " they seemed for ever to be saying. " Always another, and another ; and now you here too ! "

There was the dairyman's wife, who had waited seven years to have a child, holding a little will-o'-the wisp of a thing in her arms. Now and then for a while it would lie still, and then suddenly it would leap up and dart away ; and she, poor soul, must up and after it, though the chase were ever so long !

There also was Miller Dick with his broad thumbs, counting over a rich pile of gold, which, ever and anon, spun up into the air, and went strewing itself like dead leaves before the wind. Then he too must needs up and after it, till it was all caught again, and added together, and made right.

There were small playmates of Tulip's childhood,

each with its little conceit of treasure : one had a toy, and another a lamb, another a bird ; and all of them hunted and caught the thing they loved, and kissed it and again let go. So it went on, over and over again, more sad than the sight of a quaker as he twiddles his thumbs.

Whenever they were at peace for a moment, they turned their eyes his way. "What, you here too, Tulip ?" was always the thing they seemed to be saying.

While Tulip sat looking at them, and thinking of it all, suddenly his lady disappeared, and only her green feet darted from his side and began running round and round in a circle. Then was he just about to set off running after them, when he felt himself caught up to the coloured fires of the roof and sent spinning ungovernably through space. Suddenly he was dumped to the ground, and just as his feet were gathering themselves up under him he heard the Angelus bell ringing from the village below the slopes of the wood.

He was standing again by the side of the Wishing-Pot, and the old woman sat cowering, and blinking her spider eye at him, too much astonished to speak or move.

Tulip looked at her with a pleasant and engaging air. "Oh, good mother, what a treat you have given me!" he said. "How I wish I had money for another wish! what a pity it was ever to have wished myself back again!"

When the old witch heard that she thought still to entrap him, and answered joyfully, "Why, kind Sir, surely, kind Sir, if you like it you shall look

again! Take another wish, and never mind about the money." So she said the spell once more which opened to him the wonders of the Wishing-Pot.

Then cried Tulip, clapping his hands, "What better can I wish than to have you in the Wishing-Pot, in the place of all those poor folk whom you have imprisoned with their wishes!"

Hardly was the thing said than done; all the children who had been Tulip's playmates, and Miller Dick with his broad thumbs, and the dairyman's wife, were every one of them out, and the old witch woman was nowhere to be seen.

But Tulip put his eye to the mouth of the Wishing-Pot; and there down below he saw the old witch, running round and round as hard as she could go, pursued by a herd of green spiders. And there without doubt she remains.

And now everybody was happy except Tulip himself; for the children had all of them their toys, and the old miller his gold, and as for the dairyman's wife, she found that she had become the mother of a large and promising infant. But Tulip had altogether lost his lady of the dear green feet, for in thinking of others he had forgotten to think of himself. All the gratitude of the poor people he had saved was nothing to him in that great loss which had left him desolate. For his part he only took the Wishing-Pot up under his arm, and went sadly away home.

But before long the noise of what he had done reached to the king's ears; and he sent for Tulip to appear before him and his Court. Tulip came, carrying the Wishing-Pot under his arm, very down-

cast and sad for love of the lady of the dear green feet.

At that time all the Court was in half mourning; for the Princess Royal, who was the king's only child, and the most beautiful and accomplished of her sex, had gone perfectly distraught with grief, of which nothing could cure her. All day long she sat with her eyes shut, and tears running down, and folded hands and quiet little feet. And all this came, it was said, from a dream which she could not tell or explain to anybody.

The king had promised that whoever could rouse her from her grief, should have the princess for his wife, and become heir to the throne; and when he heard that there was such a thing in the world as a Wishing-Pot, he thought that something might be done with it.

From Tulip he learned, however, that no one knew the spell which opened the resources of the Wishing-Pot save the old witch woman who was shut up fast for ever in its inside. So it seemed to the king that the Pot could be of no use for curing the princess.

But it was so beautiful, with its shooting stars and coloured fires, that, when Tulip brought it, they carried it in to show to her.

After three hours the princess was prevailed upon to open her eyes; and directly they fell upon the great opal bowl, all at once she started to her feet and began laughing and dancing and singing.

These are the words that they heard her sing,—

"Lap for lap I must wind you;
Equal, before I can find you;
I am a lap behind you!"

Tulip, as soon as he heard the sweetness of that voice, and the words, pushed his way past the king and all his court, to where the princess was. And there over the heads of the crowd he saw his lady of the dear green feet laughing and opening her white arms to him.

As she set eyes on his face the dream of the princess came true, and all her unhappiness passed from her. So they loved and were married, to the astonishment and edification of the whole court; and lived to be greatly loved and admired by all their grandchildren.

THE WAY OF THE WIND

WHERE the world breaks up into islands among the blue waves of an eastern sea, in a little house by the seashore, lived Katipah, the only child of poor parents. When they died she was left quite alone and could not find a heart in the world to care for her. She was so poor that no man thought of marrying her, and so delicate and small that as a drudge she was worth nothing to anybody.

Once a month she would go and stand at the temple gate, and say to the people as they went in to pray, "Will nobody love me?" And the people would turn their heads away quickly and make haste to get past, and in their hearts would wonder to themselves: "Foolish little Katipah! Does she think that we can spare time to love anyone so poor and unprofitable as she?"

On the other days Katipah would go down to the beach, where everybody went who had a kite to fly—for all the men in that country flew kites, and all the children,—and there she would fly a kite of her own up into the blue air; and watching the wind carrying it farther and farther away, would grow quite happy thinking how a day might come at last when she would really be loved, though her queer little outside made her seem so poor and unprofitable.

Katipah's kite was green, with blue eyes in its square face; and in one corner it had a very small

pursed-up red mouth holding a spray of peach-blossom. She had made it herself; and to her it meant the green world, with the blue sky over it when the spring begins to be sweet; and there, tucked away in one corner of it, her own little warm mouth waiting and wishing to be kissed: and out of all that wishing and waiting the blossom of hope was springing, never to be let go.

All round her were hundreds of others flying their kites, and all had some wish or prayer to Fortune. But Katipah's wish and prayer were only that she might be loved.

The silver sandhills lay in loops and chains round the curve of the blue bay, and all along them flocks of gaily coloured kites hovered and fluttered and sprang. And, as they went up into the clear air, the wind sighing in the strings was like the crying of a young child. "Wahoo! wahoo!" every kite seemed to cradle the wailings of an invisible infant as it went mounting aloft, spreading its thin apron to the wind.

"Wahoo! wahoo!" sang Katipah's blue-and-green kite, "shall I ever be loved by anybody?" And Katipah, keeping fast hold of the string, would watch where it mounted and looked so small, and think that surely some day her kite would bring her the only thing she much cared about.

Katipah's next-door neighbour had everything that her own lonely heart most wished for: not only had she a husband, but a fine baby as well. Yet she was such a jealous, cross-grained body that she seemed to get no happiness out of the fortune Heaven had sent her. Husband and child seemed

both to have caught the infection of her bitter temper; all day and night beating and brawling went on; there seemed no peace in that house.

But for all that the woman, whose name was Bimsha, was quite proud of being a wife and a mother: and in the daytime, when her man was away, she would look over the fence and laugh at Katipah, crying boastfully, "Don't think you will ever have a husband, Katipah: you are too poor and unprofitable! Look at me, and be envious!"

Then Katipah would go softly away, and send up her kite by the seashore till she heard a far-off, sweet, babe-like cry as the wind blew through the strings high in air.

"Shall I ever be loved by anybody?" thought she, as she jerked at the cord; and away the kite flew higher than ever, and the sound of its call grew fainter.

One morning, in the beginning of the year, Katipah went up on to the hill under plum-boughs white with bloom, meaning to gather field-sorrel for her midday meal; and as she stooped with all her hair blowing over her face, and her skirts knotting and billowing round her pretty brown ankles, she felt as if someone had kissed her from behind.

"That cannot be," thought Katipah, with her fingers fast upon a stalk of field-sorrel; "it is too soon for anything so good to happen." So she picked the sorrel quietly, and put it into her basket. But now, not to be mistaken, arms came round her, and she *was* kissed.

She stood up and put her hands into her breast, quite afraid lest her little heart, which had grown

so light, should be caught by a puff of wind and blown right away out of her bosom, and over the hill and into the sea, and be drowned.

And now her eyes would not let her doubt; there by her side stood a handsome youth, with quick-fluttering, posy-embroidered raiment. His long dark hair was full of white plum-blossoms, as though he had just pushed his head through the branches above. His hands also were loaded with the same, and they kept sifting out of his long sleeves whenever he moved his arms. Under the hem of his robe Katipah could see that he had heron's wings bound about his ankles.

"He must be very good," thought Katipah, "to be so beautiful! and indeed he must be very good to kiss poor me!"

"Katipah," said the wonderful youth, "though you do not know me, I know you. It is I who so often helped you to fly your green kite by the shore. I have been up there, and have looked into its blue eyes, and kissed its little red mouth which held the peach-blossom. It was I who made songs in its strings for your heart to hear. I am the West Wind, Katipah—the wind that brings fine weather. 'Gamma-gata' you must call me, for it is I who bring back the wings that fly till the winter is over. And now I have come down to earth, to fetch you away and make you my wife. Will you come, Katipah?"

"I will come, Gamma-gata!" said Katipah, and she crouched and kissed the heron-wings that bound his feet; then she stood up and let herself go into his arms.

"Have you enough courage?" asked the West Wind.

"I do not know," answered Katipah, "for I have never tried."

"To come with me," said the Wind, "you need to have much courage; if you have not, you must wait till you learn it. But none the less for that shall you be the wife of Gamma-gata, for I am the gate of the wild geese, as my name says, and my heart is foolish with love of you." Gamma-gata took her up in his arms, and swung with her this way and that, tossing his way through blossom and leaf; and the sunlight became an eddy of gold round her, and wind and laughter seemed to become part of her being, so that she was all giddy and dazed and glad when at last Gamma-gata set her down.

"Stand still, my little one!" he cried—"stand still while I put on your bridal veil for you; then your blushes shall look like a rose-bush in snow!" So Katipah stood with her feet in the green sorrel, and Gamma-Gata went up into the plum-tree and shook, till from head to foot she was showered with white blossom.

"How beautiful you seem to me!" cried Gamma-gata when he returned to ground.

Then he lifted her once more and set her in the top of a plum-tree, and going below, cried up to her, "Leap, little Wind-wife, and let me see that you have courage!"

Katipah looked long over the deep space that lay between them, and trembled. Then she fixed her eyes fast upon those of her lover, and leapt, for in the laughter of his eyes she had lost all her fear.

He caught her half-way in air as she fell. "You are not really brave," said he; "if I had shut my eyes you would not have jumped."

"If you had shut your eyes just then," cried Katipah, "I would have died for fear."

He set her once more in the tree-top, and disappeared from her sight. "Come down to me, Katipah!" she heard his voice calling all round her.

Clinging fast to the topmost bough, "Oh, Gamma-gata," she cried, "let me see your eyes, and I will come."

Then with darkened brow he appeared to her again out of his blasts, and took her in his arms and lifted her down a little sadly till her feet touched safe earth. And he blew away the beautiful veil of blossoms with which he had showered her, while Katipah stood like a shamed child and watched it go, shredding itself to pieces in the spring sunshine.

And Gamma-gata, kissing her tenderly, said: "Go home, Katipah, and learn to have courage! and when you have learned it I will be faithful and will return to you again. Only remember, however long we may be parted, and whatever winds blow ill-fortune up to your door, Gamma-gata will watch over you. For in deed and truth you are the wife of the West Wind now, and truly he loves you, Katipah!"

"Oh, Gamma-gata!" cried Katipah, "tell the other winds, when they come, to blow courage into me, and to blow me back to you: and do not let that be long!"

"I will tell them," said Gamma-gata; and sud-

denly he was gone. Katipah saw a drift of white petals borne over the tree-tops and away to sea, and she knew that there went Gamma-gata, the beautiful windy youth who, loving her so well, had made her his wife between the showers of the plum-blossom and the sunshine, and had promised to return to her as soon as she was fit to receive him.

So Katipah gathered up her field-sorrel, and went away home and ate her solitary midday meal with a mixture of pride and sorrow in her timid little breast. "Some day, when I am grown brave," she thought, "Gamma-gata will come back to me; but he will not come yet."

In the evening Bimsha looked over the fence and jeered at her. "Do not think, Katipah," she cried, "that you will ever get a husband, for all your soft looks! You are too poor and unprofitable."

Katipah folded her meek little body together like a concertina when it shuts, and squatted to earth in great contentment of spirit. "Silly Bimsha," said she, "I already have a husband, a fine one! Ever so much finer than yours!"

Bimsha turned pale and cold with envy to hear her say that, for she feared that Katipah was too good and simple to tell her an untruth, even in mockery. But she put a brave face upon the matter, saying only, "I will believe in that fine husband of yours when I see him!"

"Oh, you will see him," answered Katipah, "if you look high enough! But he is far away over *your* head, Bimsha; and you will not hear him beating me at night, for that is not his way!"

At this soft answer Bimsha went back into her house in a fury, and Katipah laughed to herself. Then she sighed, and said, "Oh, Gamma-gata, return to me quickly, lest my word shall seem false to Bimsha, who hates me!"

Every day after this Bimsha thrust her face over the fence to say: "Katipah, where is this fine husband of yours? He does not seem to come home often."

Katipah answered slyly: "He comes home late, when it is dark, and he goes away very early, almost before it is light. It is not necessary for his happiness that he should see *you*."

"Certainly there is a change in Katipah," thought Bimsha: "she has become saucy with her tongue." But her envious heart would not allow her to let matters be. Night and morning she cried to Katipah, "Katipah, where is your fine husband?" And Katipah laughed at her, thinking to herself: "To begin with, I will not be afraid of anything Bimsha may say. Let Gamma-gata know that!"

And now every day she looked up into the sky to see what wind was blowing; but east, or north, or south, it was never the one wind that she looked for.

The east wind came from the sea, bringing rain, and beat upon Katipah's door at night. Then Katipah would rise and open, and standing in the downpour, would cry, "East wind, east wind, go and tell your brother Gamma-gata that I am not afraid of you any more than I am of Bimsha!"

One night the east wind, when she said that, pulled a tile off Bimsha's house, and threw it at

her ; and Katipah ran in and hid behind the door in a great hurry. After that she had less to say when the east wind came and blew under her gable and rattled at her door. "Oh, Gamma-gata," she sighed, "if I might only set eyes on you, I would fear nothing at all!"

When the weather grew fine again Katipah returned to the shore and flew her kite as she had always done before the love of Gamma-gata had entered her heart. Now and then, as she did so, the wind would change softly, and begin blowing from the west. Then little Katipah would pull lovingly at the string, and cry, "Oh, Gamma-gata, have you got fast hold of it up there?"

One day after dusk, when she, the last of all the flyers, hauled down her kite to earth, there she found a heron's feather fastened among the strings. Katipah knew who had sent that, and kissed it a thousand times over ; nor did she mind for many days afterwards what Bimsha might say, because the heron's feather lay so close to her heart, warming it with the hope of Gamma-gata's return.

But as weeks and months passed on, and Bimsha still did not fail to say each morning, "Katipah, where is your fine husband to-day?" the timid heart grew faint with waiting. "Alas!" thought Katipah, "if Heaven would only send me a child, I would show it to her ; she would believe me easily then! However tiny, it would be big enough to convince her. Gamma-gata, it is a very little thing that I ask!"

And now every day and all day long she sent up her kite from the seashore, praying that a child

might be born to her and convince Bimsha of the truth. Everyone said: "Katipah is mad about kite-flying! See how early she goes and how late she stays: hardly any weather keeps her indoors."

One day the west wind came full-breathed over land and sea, and Katipah was among the first on the beach to send up her messenger with word to Gamma-gata of the thing for which she prayed. "Gamma-gata," she sighed, "the voice of Bimsha afflicts me daily; my heart is bruised by the mockery she casts at me. Did I not love thee under the plum-tree, Gamma-gata? Ask of Heaven, therefore, that a child may be born to me—ever so small let it be—and Bimsha will become dumb. Gamma-gata, it is a very little thing that I am asking!"

All day long she let her kite go farther up into the sky than all the other kites. Overhead the wind sang in their strings like bees, or like the thin cry of very small children; but Katipah's was so far away she could scarcely see it against the blue. "Gamma-gata," she cried; till the twilight drew sea and land together, and she was left alone.

Then she called down her kite sadly; hand over hand she drew it by the cord, till she saw it fluttering over her head like a great moth searching for a flower in the gloom. "Wahoo! wahoo!" she could hear the wind crying through its strings like the wailing of a very small child.

It had become so dark that Katipah hardly knew what the kite had brought her till she touched the tiny warm limbs that lay cradled among the strings that netted the frame to its cord. Full of wonder

and delight, she lifted the windling out of its nest, and laid it in her bosom. Then she slung her kite across her shoulder, and ran home, laughing and crying for joy and triumph to think that all Bimsha's mockery must now be at an end.

So, quite early the next morning, Katipah sat herself down very demurely in the doorway, with her child hidden in the folds of her gown, and waited for Bimsha's evil eye to look out upon her happiness.

She had not long to wait. Bimsha came out of her door, and looking across to Katipah, cried, "Well, Katipah, and where is your fine husband to-day?"

"My husband is gone out," said Katipah, "but if you care to look you can see my baby. It is ever so much more beautiful than yours."

Bimsha, when she heard that, turned green and yellow with envy; and there, plain to see, was Katipah holding up to view the most beautiful babe that ever gave the sunlight a good excuse for visiting this wicked earth. The mere sight of so much innocent beauty and happiness gave Bimsha a shock from which it took her three weeks to recover. After that she would sit at her window and for pure envy keep watch to see Katipah and the child playing together—the child which was so much more beautiful and well-behaved than her own.

As for Katipah, she was so happy now that the sorrow of waiting for her husband's return grew small. Day by day the west wind blew softly, and she knew that Gamma-gata was there, keeping watch over her and her child.

Every day she would say to the little one, " Come, my plum-petal, my wind-flower, I will send thee up to thy father that he may see how fat thou art getting, and be proud of thee ! " And going down to the shore, she would lay the child among the strings of her kite and send it up to where Gamma-gata blew a wide breath over sea and land. As it went she would hear the child crow with joy at being so uplifted from earth, and laughing to herself, she would think, " When he sees his child so patterned after his own heart, Gamma-gata will be too proud to remain long away from me."

When she drew the child back to her out of the sky, she covered it with caresses, crying, " Oh, my wind-blown one, my cloudlet, my sky-blossom, my little piece out of heaven, hast thou seen thy father, and has he told thee that he loves me ? " And the child would crow with mysterious delight, being too young to tell anything it knew in words.

Bimsha, out of her window, watched and saw all this, not comprehending it : and in her evil heart a wish grew up that she might by some means put an end to all Katipah's happiness. So one day towards evening, when Katipah, alone upon the shore, had let her kite and her little one go up to the fleecy edges of a cloud through which the golden sunlight was streaming, Bimsha came softly behind and with a sharp knife cut the string by which alone the kite was held from falling.

" Oh, silly Bimsha ! " cried Katipah, " what have you done that for ? "

Up in air the kite made a far plunge forward, fluttered and stumbled in its course, and came shoot-

ing headlong to earth. "Oh dear!" cried Katipah, "if my beautiful little kite gets torn, Bimsha, that will be your fault!"

When the kite fell, it lay unhurt on one of the soft sandhills that ringed the bay; but no sign of the child was to be seen. Katipah was laughing when she picked up her kite and ran home. And Bimsha thought, "Is it witchcraft, or did the child fall into the sea?"

In the night the West Wind came and tapped at Katipah's window; and rising from her bed, she heard Gamma-gata's voice calling tenderly to her. When she opened the window to the blindness of the black night, he kissed her, and putting the little one in her arms, said, "Wait only a little while longer, Katipah, and I will come again to you. Already you are learning to be brave."

In the morning Bimsha looked out, and there sat Katipah in her own doorway, with the child safe and sound in her arms. And, plain to see, he had on a beautiful golden coat and little silver wings were fastened to his feet, and his head was garnished with a wreath of flowers the like of which were never seen on earth. He was like a child of noble birth and fortune, and the small motherly face of Katipah shone with pride and happiness as she nursed him.

"Where did you steal those things?" asked Bimsha, "and how did that child come back? I thought he had fallen into the sea and been drowned."

"Ah!" answered Katipah slyly, "he was up in the clouds when the kite left him, and he came down with the rain last night. It is nothing wonderful.

You were foolish, Bimsha, if you thought that to fall into the clouds would do the child any harm. Up there you can have no idea how beautiful it is—such fields of gold, such wonderful gardens, such flowers and fruits: it is from there that all the beauty and wealth of the world must come. See all that he has brought with him! and it is all your doing, because you cut the cord of my kite. Oh, clever Bimsha!"

As soon as Bimsha heard that, she ran and got a big kite, and fastening her own child into the strings, started it to fly. "Do not think," cried the envious woman, "that you are the only one whose child is to be clothed in gold! My child is as good as yours any day; wait, and you shall see!"

So presently, when the kite was well up into the clouds, as Katipah's kite had been, she cut the cord, thinking surely that the same fortune would be for her as had been for Katipah. But instead of that, all at once the kite fell headlong to earth, child and all; and when she ran to pick him up, Bimsha found that her son's life had fallen forfeit to her own enviousness and folly.

The wicked woman went green and purple with jealousy and rage; and running to the chief magistrate, she told him that while she was flying a kite with her child fastened to its back, Katipah had come and cut the string, so that by her doing the child was now dead.

When the magistrate heard that, he sent and caused Katipah to be thrown into prison, and told her that the next day she should certainly be put to death.

Katipah went meekly, carrying her little son in one hand and her blue-and-green kite in the other, for that had become so dear to her she could not now part from it. And all the way to prison Bimsha followed, mocking her, and asking, "Tell us, Katipah, where is your fine husband now?"

In the night the West Wind came and tapped at the prison window, and called tenderly, "Katipah, Katipah, are you there?" And when Katipah got up from her bed of straw and looked out, there was Gamma-gata once more, the beautiful youth whom she loved and had been wedded to, and had heard but had not seen since.

Gamma-gata reached his hands through the bars and put them round her face. "Katipah," he said, "you have become brave: you are fit now to become the wife of the West Wind. To-morrow you shall travel with me all over the world; you shall not stay in one land any more. Now give me our son; for a little while I must take him from you. To prove your courage you must find your own way out of this trouble which you have got into through making a fool of Bimsha." So Katipah gave him the child through the bars of her prison window, and when he was gone lay down and slept till it became light.

In the morning the chief magistrate and Bimsha, together with the whole populace, came to Katipah's cell to see her led out to death. And when it was found that her child had disappeared, "She is a witch!" they cried; "she has eaten it!" And the chief magistrate said that, being a witch, instead of hanging she was to be burned.

"I have not eaten my child, and I am no witch,"

said Katipah, as, taking with her her blue-and-green kite she trotted out to the place of execution. When she was come to the appointed spot she said to the chief magistrate, " To every criminal it is permitted to plead in defence of himself; but because I am innocent, am I not also allowed to plead ? " The magistrate told her she might speak if she had anything to say.

" All I ask," said Katipah, " is that I may be allowed once more to fly my blue-and-green kite as I used to do in the days when I was happy; and I will show you soon that I am not guilty of what is laid to my charge. It is a very little thing that I ask."

So the magistrate gave her leave; and there before all the people she sent up her kite till it flew high over the roofs of the town. Gently the West Wind took it and blew it away towards the sea. " Oh, Gammagata," she whispered softly, " hear me now, for I am not afraid."

The wind blew hard upon the kite, and pulled as though to catch it away, so Katipah twisted the cord once or twice round her waist that she might keep the safer hold over it. Then she said to the chief magistrate and to all the people that were assembled : " I am innocent of all that is charged against me; for, first, it was that wicked Bimsha herself who killed her own child."

" Prove it ! " cried the magistrate.

" I cannot," replied Katipah.

" Then you must die ! " said the magistrate.

" In the second place," went on Katipah, " I did not eat my own child."

"Prove it!" cried the chief magistrate again.

"I will," said Katipah; "O Gamma-gata, it is a very little thing that I ask."

Down the string of the kite, first a mere speck against the sky, then larger till plain for all to see came the missing one, slithering and sliding, with his golden coat, and the little silver wings tied to his ankles, and handfuls of flowers which he threw into his mother's face as he came. "Oh! cruel chief magistrate," cried Katipah, receiving the babe in her arms, "does it seem that I have eaten him?"

"You are a witch!" said the chief magistrate, "or how do you come to have a child that disappears and comes again from nowhere! It is not possible to permit such things to be: you and your child shall both be burned together!"

Katipah drew softly upon the kite-string. "Oh, Gamma-gata," she cried, "lift me up now very high, and I will not be afraid!"

Then suddenly, before all eyes, Katipah was lifted up by the cord of the kite which she had wound about her waist; right up from the earth she was lifted till her feet rested above the heads of the people.

Katipah, with her babe in her arms, swung softly through the air, out of reach of the hands stretched up to catch her, and addressed the populace in these words:

"Oh, cruel people, who will not believe innocence when it speaks, you must believe me now! I am the wife of the West Wind—of Gamma-gata, the beautiful, the bearer of fine weather, who also brings back the wings that fly till the winter is over. Is

it well, do you think, to be at war with the West Wind ?

" Ah, foolish ones, I go now, for Gamma-gata calls me, and I am no longer afraid : I go to travel in many lands, whither he carries me, and it will be long before I return here. Many dark days are coming to you, when you shall not feel the west wind, the bearer of fine weather, blowing over you from land to sea ; nor shall you see the blossoms open white over the hills, nor feel the earth grow warm as the summer comes in, because the bringer of fair weather is angry with you for the foolishness which you have done. But when at last the west wind returns to you, remember that Katipah the poor and unprofitable one, is Gamma-gata's wife, and that she has remembered, and has prayed for you."

And so saying, Katipah threw open her arms and let go the cord of the kite which held her safe. " Oh, Gamma-gata," she cried, " I do not see your eyes, but I am not afraid ! " And at that, even while she seemed upon the point of falling to destruction, there flashed into sight a fair youth with dark hair and garments full of a storm of flying petals, who, catching up Katipah and her child in his arms, laughed scorn upon those below, and roaring over the roofs of the town, vanished away seawards.

When a chief magistrate and his people, after flagrant wrong-doing, become thoroughly cowed and frightened, they are apt also to be cruel. Poor Bimsha !

THE BOUND PRINCESS

I

THE FIRE-EATERS

ALONG time ago there lived a man who had the biggest head in the world. Into it he had crammed all the knowledge that might be gathered from the four corners of the earth. Everyone said he was the wisest man living. "If I could only find a wife," said the sage, "as wise for a woman as I am for a man, what a race of head-pieces we could bring into the world!"

He waited many years before any such mate could be found for him: yet, at last, found she was—one into whose head was bestowed all the wisdom that might be gathered from the four quarters of heaven.

They were both old, but kings came from all sides to their wedding, and offered themselves as god-parents to the first-born of the new race that was to be. But, to the grief of his parents, the child, when he arrived, proved to be a simpleton; and no second child ever came to repair the mistake of the first.

That he was a simpleton was evident; his head was small and his limbs were large, and he could run long before he could talk or do arithmetic. In the bitterness of their hearts his father and mother named him Noodle, without the aid of any royal god-parents; and from that moment, for any care

they took in his bringing-up, they washed their wise hands of him.

Noodle grew and prospered, and enjoyed life in his own foolish way. When his father and mother died within a short time of each other, they left him alone without any friend in the world.

For a good while Noodle lived on just what he could find in the house, in a hand-to-mouth sort of way, till at last only the furniture and the four bare walls were left to him.

One cold winter's night he sat brooding over the fire, wondering where he should get food for the morrow, when he heard feet coming up to the door, and a knock striking low down upon the panel. Outside there was a faint chirping and crackling sound, and a whispering as of fire licking against the woodwork without.

He opened the door and peered forth into the night. There, just before him, stood seven little men huddled up together; three feet high they were, with bright yellow faces all shrivelled and sharp, and eyes whose light leaped and sank like candle flame before a gust.

When they saw him, they shut their eyes and opened famished mouths at him, pointing inwards with flickering finger-tips, and shivering from head to foot with cold, although it seemed to the youth as if the warmth of a slow fire came from them. "Alas!" said Noodle, in reply to these signs of hunger, "I have not left even a crust of bread in the house to give you! But at least come in and make yourselves warm!" He touched the foremost, making signs for them all to enter. "Ah," he cried,

" what is this, and what are you, that the mere touch of you burns my finger ? "

Without answer they huddled tremblingly across the threshold ; but so soon as they saw the fire burning on the hearth, they yelped all together like a pack of hounds, and, throwing themselves face forwards into the hot embers, began ravenously to lap up the flames. They lapped and lapped, and the more they lapped the more the fire sank away and died. Then with their flickering finger-tips they stirred the hot logs and coals, burrowing after the thin tapes and swirls of vanishing flame, and fetching them out like small blue eels still wriggling for escape.

After each blue wisp had been gulped down, they sipped and sucked at their fingers for any least tricklet of flavour that might be left ; and at the last seemed more famished than when they began.

" More, more, O wise Noodle, give us more ! " they cried ; and Noodle threw the last of his fuel on the embers.

They breathed round it, fanning it into a great blaze that leaped and danced up to the rafters ; then they fell on, till not a fleck or a flake of it was left. Noodle, seeing them still famished, broke up a stool and threw that on the hearth. And again they flared it with their breath and gobbled off the flame. When the stool was finished he threw in the table, then the dresser, and after that the oak-chest and the window-seat.

Still they feasted and were not fed. Noodle fetched an axe, and broke down the door ; then he wrenched up the boards from the floor, and pulled

the beams and rafters out of the ceiling; yet, even so, his guests were not to be satisfied.

"I have nothing left," he said, "but the house itself; but since you are still hungry you shall be welcome to it!"

He scattered the fire that remained upon the hearth, and threw it out and about the room; and as he ran forth to escape, up against all the walls and right through the roof rose a great crackling sheaf of flame. In the midst of the fire, Noodle could see his seven guests lying along on their bellies, slopping their hands in the heat, and lapping up the flames with their tongues. "Surely," he thought, "I have given them enough to eat at last!"

After a while all the fire was eaten away, and only the black and smouldering ruins were left. Day came coldly to light, and there sat Noodle, without a home in the world, watching with considerate eye his seven guests finishing their inordinate repast.

They all rose to their feet together, and came towards him bowing; as they approached he felt the heat of their bodies as it had been seven furnaces.

"Enough, O wise Noodle!" said they, "we have had enough!" "That," answered Noodle, "is the least thing left me to wonder at. Go your ways in peace; but first tell me, who are you?" They replied, "We are the Fire-eaters: far from our own land, and strangers, you have done us this service; what, now, can we do to serve you?" "Put me in the way of a living," said Noodle, "and you will do me the greatest service of all."

Then the one of them who seemed to be chief took from his finger a ring having for its centre a

great firestone, and threw it into the snow, saying, "Wait for three hours till the ring shall have had time to cool, then take it, and wear it; and whatever fortune you deserve it shall bring you. For this ring is the sweetener of everything that it touches: bread it turns into rich meats, water into strong wine, grief into virtue, and labour into strength. Also, if you ever need our help, you have but to brandish the ring, and the gleam of it will reach us, and we will be with you wherever you may be."

With that they bowed their top-knots to the ground and departed, inverting themselves swiftly till only the shining print of seven pairs of feet remained, red-hot, over the place where they had been standing.

Noodle waited for three hours; then he took up the firestone ring, and putting it on his finger set out into the world.

At the first door he came to, he begged a crust of bread, and touching it with the ring found it tasted like rich meats, well cooked and delicately flavoured. Also, the water which he drew in the hollow of his hand from a brook by the roadside tasted to him like strong wine.

II

THE GALLOPING PLOUGH

NOODLE went on many miles till he came near to a rich man's farm. Though it was the middle of winter, all the fields showed crops of corn in progress; here it was in thin blade, and here green, but in full ear; and here it was ripe

and ready for harvest. "How is this," he said to the first man he met, "that you have corn here in the middle of winter?" "Ah!" said the man, "you have not heard of the Galloping Plough; you too have to fall under bondage to my master." "What is your master?" inquired Noodle, "and in what bondage does he bind men?" "My master, and your master that shall soon be," answered the old man, "is the owner of all this land and the farmer of it. He is rich and sleek and fat like his own furrows, for he has the Galloping Plough as his possession. Ah, that! 'tis a very miracle, a wonder, a thing to catch at the heartstrings of all beholders; it shines like a moonbeam, and is better than an Arab mare for swiftness; it warms the very ground that it enters, so that seeds take root and spring, though it be the middle of winter. No man sees it but what he loses his heart to it, and sells his freedom for the possession of it. All here are men like myself who have become slaves because of that desire. You also, when you see it, will become slave to it."

Noodle went on through the summer and the spring corn, till he came to bare fields. Ahead of him on a hill-top he saw the farmer himself, sleek and rosy, and of full paunch, lolling like a lord at his ease; yet with a working eye in the midst of his leisure.

To and fro, up to him and back, shot a silver gleam over the purple brown of the fields; and Noodle's heart gave a thump at the sight, for the spell of the Galloping Plough was on him.

Now and then he heard a clear sound that

startled him with its note. It was like the sweet whistling cry of a bird many times multiplied. Ever when the silver gleam of the Plough had run its farthest from the farmer, the cry sounded; and at the sound the gleam wavered and stayed and flew back dartingly to the farmer's side. So Noodle understood how this was the farmer's signal for the Plough to return; and the Plough knew it as a horse its master's voice, and came so fast that the wind whistled against its silver side.

As he watched, Noodle's heart went down into the valley and up the hillside, following in the track of the Galloping Plough. "I can never be happy again," thought he; "either I must possess it, or must die."

He came to the farmer where he sat calling his Plough to him and letting it go; and the farmer smiled, the wide indulgent smile of a man who knows that a bargain is about to fall his way.

"What is the price," asked Noodle, "of yonder Galloping Plough, that runs like an Arab mare, and returns to you at your call?"

Said the farmer, "A year's service; and if the Plough will follow you, it is yours; if not, then you must be my bondman until you die!"

Noodle looked once the way of the Galloping Plough, and his heart flapped at his side like a sail which the wind drops and lets go; and he had no thought or will left in him but to be where the Galloping Plough was. So he closed hands on the bargain, to be the farmer's servant either for a year, or for his whole life.

For a year he worked upon the farm, and all the

while plotted how he might win the Galloping Plough to himself. The farmer kept no watch upon it, nor put it under lock and key, for the Plough recognised no voice but his own, nor went nor came save at his bidding. In the night Noodle would go down to the shed or field where it lay, and whistle to it, trying to put forth notes of the same magical power as those which came through the farmer's lips.

But no sound that came from his lips ever stroked life into its silver sides. The year was nearly run out, and Noodle was in despair.

Then he remembered the firestone ring, the Sweetener. "Maybe," said he, "since it changes to sweetness whatever I eat and drink, it will sweeten my voice also, so that the Plough will obey." So he put the ring between his lips and whistled; and at the sound his heart turned a somersault for joy, for he felt that out of his mouth the farmer's magic had been over-topped and conquered.

The Galloping Plough stirred faintly from the furrow where it lay, breaking the ground and marring its smooth course. Then it shook its head slowly, and returned impassively to rest.

In the morning the farmer came and saw the broken earth close under the Plough's nose. Noodle, hiding among the corn hard by, heard him say, "What hast thou heard in the night, O my moonbeam, my miracle, that thy lily-foot has trodden up the ground? Hast thou forgotten whose hand feeds thee, whose corn it is thou lovest, whose heart's care also cherishes thee?"

The farmer went away, and presently came back bearing a bowl of corn; and Noodle saw the Plough lift its head to its master's palm, and feed like a horse on the grain.

Then Noodle, gay of heart, waited till it was night, and surely his time was short, for on the morrow his wages were to be paid, and the Plough was to be his, or else he was to be the farmer's bond-servant for the rest of his life. He took with him three handfuls of corn, and went down to where the Plough stood waiting by the furrow. Shaping his lips to the ring, he whistled gently like a lover, and immediately the Plough stirred, and lifted up its head as if to look at him.

"O my moonbeam, my miracle," whispered Noodle, "wilt thou not come to the one that feeds thee?" and he held out a handful of corn. But the Plough gave no regard to him or his grain: slowly it moved away from him back into the furrow.

Then Noodle laughed softly and dropped his ring, the Sweetener, into the hand that held the grain; and barely had he offered the corn before he felt the silver Plough nozzling at his palm, and eating as a horse eats from the hand of its master.

Then he whistled again, placing the Sweetener back between his lips; and the Galloping Plough sprang after him, and followed at his heels like a dog.

So, finding himself its master, he bid it stay for the night; and in the morning he said to the farmer, "Give me my wages, and let me go!"

And the farmer laughed, saying, "Take your wages, and go!"

Then Noodle took off his ring, the Sweetener, and laid it between his lips and blew through it; and up like a moonbeam, and like an Arab mare, sprang the Galloping Plough at his call. So he leaped upon its back, crying, "Carry me away out of this land, O thou moonbeam, and miracle of beauty, and never slacken nor stay except I bid thee!"

Vainly the farmer, borne down on a torrent of rage and amazement, whistled his best, and threw corn and rice from the rear; for the whistling of Noodle was sweeter to the ear, and his corn sweeter to the taste, and he nearer to the heart of the Galloping Plough than was the old master whom it left behind.

III

THE THIRSTY WELL

SO they escaped, slitting the swift hours with ungovernable speed. The furrow they two made in the world that day, as they went shooting over the round of it, was called in after times the Equator, and men still know it by the heat of it, though it has since been covered over by the dust of ages.

To Noodle, as he went careering round it, the whole world's circuit ran in a line across his brain, entering his vision and passing through it as a thread through the needle's eye. Nor would he

of his own will ever have stopped his galloping, but that at the completion of the first round a mighty thirst took hold of him. "O my moonbeam," he said, choking behind parched lips, and sick at heart, "check me, or I faint!" And the Galloping Plough stopped at once, and set him to earth in a green space under the shadow of overhanging boughs.

He found himself in a richly grown garden, a cool paradise for a traveller to rest in. Close at hand and inviting to the eye was a well with a bucket slung ready to be let down. Noodle had little thought of seeking for the owner of the garden to beg for a drink, since water is an equal gift to all and the right of any man; but as he drew near he found the means to it withheld from him, the lid being fast locked. He went on in search of the owner, till at length he came upon the same lying half asleep under a thorn-bush with the key in her hand. She was an old woman, so withered and dry, she looked as if no water could have ever passed her lips.

When Noodle asked for a drink from the well, she looked at him bright and sharp, and said: "Before any man drinks of my water he must make a bargain with me." "What is the bargain?" asked Noodle; and she led him down to the well.

Then she unlocked the lid and bade him look in; and at the sight Noodle knew for a second time that his heart had been stolen from him, and that to be happy he must taste that water or die.

Again he asked, with his eyes intent upon the blue wrimpling of the water in the well's depth,

"What is the bargain?" And the old woman answered, "If you fail to draw water out of the well you must fling yourself into it." For answer Noodle swung down the bucket, lowering it as fast as it would go; then he set both hands to the windlass and wound.

He heard the water splashing off the sides of the bucket all the way up, as the shortening rope brought it near; but when he drew it over the well's brink wonder and grief held him fast, for the bucket was as empty as vanity. From behind him came a noise of laughter, and there was the old witch running round and round in a circle; and everywhere a hedge of thorns came shooting up to enclose him and keep him fast for her.

"What a trap I am in!" thought Noodle; but once more he lowered the bucket, and once more it returned to him empty.

The old woman climbed up into the thorn-hedge, and sat on its top, singing:

> "Overground, underground, round-about spell;
> The Thirsty has come to the Thirsty Well!"

Again Noodle let down the bucket; and this time as he drew it up he looked over into the well's heart, and saw all the way up the side a hundred blue arms reaching out crystal scallops and drawing water out of the bucket as hard as they could go. He saw thick lips like sea-anemones thrust out between the crevices of the wall, sucking the crystals dry as fast as they were filled. "Truly," he said to himself, "this is a thirsty well, but myself am thirstier!"

When he had drawn up the bucket empty for the third time, he stood considering; and at last he fastened to it the firestone ring, the Sweetener, and lowered it once more. Then he laughed to himself as he drew up, and felt the bucket lightening at every turn till it touched the surface of things.

Empty he found it, with only his firestone hanging by the rim, and once again he let it down to be refilled. But this time as he wound up, nothing could keep him from letting a curious eye go over the brink, to see how the Well-folk fared over their wine; and in what he beheld there was already comfort for his soul.

The blue arms went like oars out of unison; like carpet-beaters stricken in the eyes and throat with dust, they beat foolishly against the sides and bottom of the bucket, shattering and letting fall their goblets in each unruly attempt. And because Noodle wound leniently at the rope, willing that they should have their fill, at the last gasp they were able to send the bucket empty to the top. It was the last staving off of destiny that lay in their power to make; thereafter wine conquered them.

Quickly Noodle drew out the ring, and sent the bucket flying on its last errand. It smacked the water, heeled over, and dipped under a full draught. Then Noodle spun the windlass with the full pinch of his energies, calling on the bucket to ascend. He heard the water spilling from its sides, and knew that the blue arms were there, battling to arrest it as it flew, and to pay him back once more with emptiness and mockery. Yet in spite of them the bucket hasted and lightened not, but was drawn

up to the well's head brimming largely, and winking a blue eye joyously to the light of day.

Over head and ears Noodle plunged for the quenching of his thirst, nor stayed nor drew back till his head had smitten upon the bottom of the bucket in his pursuit of the draught. Then it was apparent that only a third of the water remained, the rest having obeyed the imperative suction of his throat, and that the thirsty well had at last found a master under the eye of heaven.

In the depth of the bucket the water flashed like a burning sapphire and swung circling, curling and coiling, tossing this way and that, as if struggling to get out. At last with a laugh it threw down the bucket, and tore back into the well with a crash like thunder.

Up from the well rose a chant of voices :

> " Under Heaven, over Hell,
> You have broken the spell,
> You are lord of the Well."

Noodle stepped over the brink of his new realm, calling the Well-folk to reach hands for him and bear him down. All round, the blue arms started out, catching him and handing him on from one to another ladderwise, down, and down, and down. As he went, anemone lips came out of the crannies in the wall, and kissed his feet and hands in token of allegiance. " You are lord of the well ! " they said, as they passed him each one to the next.

He came to the bottom of the well ; under his feet, wherever he stepped upon its waters, hands came up and sustained him. The knowledge of

everything that was there had become his. "Give me," he said, "the crystal cup that is for him who holds kingship over you; so shall I be lord of you in all places wherever I go."

A blue arm reached down and drew up from the water a small crystal, that burned through the darkness with a blue fire, and gave it to Noodle. "Now I am your king, however far from you!" said Noodle. And they answered, chanting:

> "Under Heaven, over Hell,
> You have broken the spell,
> You are lord of the Well."

"Lift me up!" said he; and the blue arms caught him and lifted him up; from one to another they passed him in ascending circles, till he came to the mouth of the well.

There overhead was the old witch, crouching and looking in to know what had become of him; and her hair hung far down over her eyes into the well. He caught her to him by it over the brink. "Old witch," he said, "you must change places with me now!" and he tossed her down to the bottom of the well.

She went like a falling shuttlecock, shrieking as she fell; and as she struck the water, the drowned bodies of the men she had sent there came to the surface, and caught her by the feet and hair, and drew her down, making an end of her, as she also had made of them.

IV

THE PRINCESS MELILOT

WHEN Noodle, carrying the crystal with him, set foot once more upon dry land, straightway he was again upon the back of the Galloping Plough, with the world flying away under him. But now weariness came over him, and his head weighed this way and that, so that earth and sky mixed themselves before his gaze, and he was so drugged with sleep that he had no wits to bid the Plough slacken from its speed. Therefore it happened that as they passed a wood, a hanging bough caught him, and brushed him like a feather from his place, landing him on a green bosom of grass, where he slept the sleep of the weary, nor ever lifted his head to see the Plough fast disappearing over hill and valley and plain, out of sound of his voice or sight of his eye.

When Noodle awoke and found that the Plough was gone, he was bitter against himself for his folly. "So poor a use to make of so noble a steed!" he cried; "no wonder it has gone from me to seek for a worthier master! If by good fortune I find it again, needs must I do great things by its aid to be worthy of its service." So he set out, following the furrow of its course, determined, however far he must seek, to journey on till he found it.

For a whole year he travelled, till at length he came, footsore and weary, to a deserted palace standing in the midst of an overgrown garden. The great gates, which lay wide open, were overrun

with creepers, and the paths were green with weeds. That morning he had thought that he saw far away on the hills the gleam of his silver Plough, and now hope rose high, for he could see by its track that the Plough had passed before him into the garden of the palace. "O my moonbeam," he thought, "is it here I shall find you at last?"

Within the garden there was a sound of cross questions and crooked answers, of many talking with loud voices, and of one weeping apart from the rest. When he got quite close, he was struck still with awe, and joy, and wonder. For first there lay the Galloping Plough in the middle of a green lawn, and round it a score of serving-men, tugging at it and trying to make it move on. Near by stood an old woman, wringing her hands and begging them to leave it alone: "For," cried she, "if the Plough touches but the feet of the Princess, she will be uprooted, and will presently wither away and die. Of what use is it to break one, if the other enchantments cannot be broken?"

In the centre of the lawn grew a bower of roses, and beneath the bower stood the loveliest princess that ever eye beheld; but she stood there motionless, and without sign of life. She seemed neither to hear, nor see, nor breathe; her feet were rooted to the ground; though they seemed only to rest lightly under her weight upon the grass, no man, nor a hundred men, could stir her from where she stood. And, as the spell that held her fast bound to the spot, even so was the spell that sealed her senses,—no man might lift it from her. When Noodle set eyes upon her he knew that for the third

time his heart had been stolen from him, and that to be happy he must possess her, or die.

He ran quickly to the old woman, who, unregarded by the serving-men, stood weeping and wringing her hands. "Tell me," said Noodle, "who is this sleeper who stands enchanted and rooted like a flower to earth? And who are you, and these others who work and cry at cross purposes?"

The old woman cried from a wide mouth: "It is my mistress, the honey-jewel of my heart, whom you see here so grievously enchanted. All the gifts of the fairies at her christening did not prevent what was foretold of her at her birth. In her seventeenth year, as you see her now, so it was told of her that she should be."

"Does she live?" asked Noodle; "is she asleep? She is not dead; when will she wake? Tell me, old woman, her history, and how this fate has come upon her."

"She was the daughter of the king of this country by his first wife," said the old woman, "and heir to the throne after his death; but when her mother died the king married again, and the three daughters he had by his second wife were jealous of the beauty, and charm, and goodness which raised their sister so high above them in the estimation of all men. So they asked their mother to teach them a spell that should rob Melilot of her charms, and make them useless in the eyes of men. And their mother, who was wise in such arts, taught to each of them a spell, so that together they might work their will.

"One day they came running to Melilot, and said, 'Come and play with us a new game that our mother has taught us!' Then they began turning themselves into flowers. 'I will be a hollyhock!' said one. 'And I will be a columbine!' said another; and saying the spell over each other they became each the flower they had named.

"Then they unloosed the spells, and became themselves again. 'Oh, it is so nice to be a flower!' they cried, laughing and clapping their hands. But Melilot knew no spell.

"At last, seeing how her sisters turned into flowers, and came back safe again, 'I will be a rose!' she cried; 'turn me into a rose and out again!'

"Then her three sisters joined their tongues together, and finished the spell over her. And so soon as she had become a rose-tree, the three sisters turned into three moles, and went down under the earth and gnawed at the roots.

"Then they came up, and took their own forms again, and sang,—

"'Sister, sister, here you are now,
Till the ploughman come with the Galloping Plough!'

"Then they turned into bees, and sucked out the honey from the roses, and coming to themselves again they sang,—

"'Sister, here you must doze and doze,
Till they bring you a flower of the Burning Rose!'

"Then they shook the dewdrops out of her eyes, crying,—

"'Sister, your brain lies under our spell,
Till water be brought from the Thirsty Well!'

"Then they took the top blossom of all, and broke it to pieces, and threw the petals away as they cried,—

"'Sister, your life goes down for a term,
Till they bring you breath from the Camphor-Worm!'

"And when they had done all this, they turned her back into her true shape, and left her standing even as you see her now, without warmth, or sight, or memory, or motion, dead saving for her beauty, that never changes or dies. And here she must stand till the spells which have been fastened upon her have been unloosed. No long time after, the wickedness of the three sisters and of their cruel mother was discovered to the king, and they were all put to death for the crime. Yet the ill they had done remained; and the king's grief became so great to see his loved daughter standing dead before him that he removed with his court to another place, and left this palace to the care of only a few serving-men, and myself to keep watch and guard over the Princess.

"So now four-fold is the spell that holds her, and to break the lightest of them the water of the Thirsty Well is needed; with two of its drops laid upon her eyes memory will come back to her, and her mind will remember of the things of the past. And for the breaking of the second spell is needed

a blossom of the Burning Rose, and the plucking of that no man's hand can achieve; but when the Rose is laid upon her breast, her heart will belong to the world once more, and will beat again under her bosom. And for the breaking of the third spell one must bring the breath of the Camphor-Worm that has lain for a whole year inside its body, and breathe it between her lips; then she will breathe again, and all her five senses will return to her. And for the last spell only the Galloping Plough can uproot her back to life, and free her feet for the ways of earth. Now, here we have the Galloping Plough with no man who can guide it, and what aid can it be? If these fools should be able to make it so much as but touch the feet of my dear mistress, she will be mown down like grass, and die presently for lack of earth; for only the three other charms I have told you of can put whole life back into her."

"As for the mastery of the Plough," said Noodle, "I will fetch that from them in a breath. See, in a moment, how marvellous will be the uplifting of their eyes!" He put to his lips the firestone ring—the Sweetener—and blew but one note through it. Then in a moment the crowd divided hither and thither, with cries of wonder and alarm, for the Plough turned and bounded back to its master quickly, as an Arab mare at the call of her owner.

The old woman, weeping for gladness, cried: "Thou art master of the Plough! art thou master of all the other things as well?"

He said: "Of one thing only. Tell me of the Burning Rose and the Camphor-Worm; what and where are they? For I am the master of the ends

of the earth by reason of the speed with which this carries me; and I am lord of the Thirsty Well, and have the Fire-eaters for my friends."

The old woman clapped her hands, and blessed him for his youth, and his wisdom, and his courage. "First," she said, "restore to the Princess her memory by means of the water of the Thirsty Well; then I will show you the way to the Burning Rose, for the easier thing must be done first."

Then Noodle drew out the crystal and breathed in it, calling on the Well-folk for the two drops of water to lay on Princess Melilot's eyes. Immediately in the bottom of the cup appeared two blue drops of water, that came climbing up the sides of the glass and stood trembling together on the brim. And Noodle, touching them with the firestone ring to make the memory of things sweet to her, bent back the Princess's face, and let them fall under her closed lids.

"Look!" cried the faithful nurse, "light trembles within those eyes of hers! In there she begins to remember things; but as yet she sees and hears nothing. Now it is for you to be swift and fetch her the blossom of the Burning Rose. Be wise, and you shall not fail!"

V

THE BURNING ROSE

SHE told him how he was to go, across the desert southward, till he found a giant, longer in length than a day's journey, lying asleep upon the sand. Over his head, it was told, hung a cloud,

covering him from the heat and resting itself against his brows ; within the cloud was a dream, and within the dream grew the garden of the Burning Rose. Than this she knew no more, nor by what means Noodle might gain entrance and become possessor of the Rose.

Noodle waited for no more ; he mounted upon the Galloping Plough, and pressed away over the desert to the south. For three days he travelled through parched places, refreshing himself by the way with the water of the Thirsty Well, calling on the Well-folk for the replenishment of his crystal, and turning the draught to wine by the sweetness of his magic ring.

At length he saw a cloud rising to him from a distance ; like a great opal it hung motionless between earth and heaven. Coming nearer he saw the giant himself stretched out for a day's journey across the sand. His head lay under the colours of the dawn, and his feet were covered with the dusk of evening, and over his middle shone the noonday sun.

Under the giant's shadow Noodle stopped, and gazed up into the cloud ; through the outer covering of its mists he saw what seemed to be balls of fire, and knew that within lay the dream and the garden of the Burning Rose.

The giant laughed and muttered in his sleep, for the dream was sweet to him. " O Rose," he said, " O sweet Rose, what end is there of thy sweetness ? How innumerable is the dance of the Roses of my Rose-garden ! "

Noodle caught hold of the ropes of the giant's

hair, and climbed till he sat within the hollow of his right ear. Then he put to his lips the ring, the Sweetener, and sang till the giant heard him in his sleep; and the sweet singing mixed itself with the sweetness of the Rose in the giant's brain, and he muttered to himself, saying: "O bee, O sweet bee, O bee in my brain, what honey wilt thou fetch for me out of the roses of my Rose-garden?"

So, more and more, Noodle sweetened himself to the giant, till the giant passed him into his brain and into the heart of the dream, even into the garden of the Burning Rose.

Far down below the folds of the cloud, Noodle remembered that the Galloping Plough lay waiting a call from him. "When I have stolen the Rose," thought he, "I may need swift heels for my flight." And he put the Sweetener to his lips and whistled the Plough up to him.

It came, cleaving the encirclement of clouds like a silver gleam of moonlight, and for a moment, where they parted, Noodle saw a rift of blue sky, and the light of the outer world clear through their midst.

The giant turned uneasily in his sleep, and the garden of the Burning Rose rocked to its foundations as the edge of things real pierced into it.

"While I stay here there is danger," thought Noodle. "Surely I must make haste to possess myself of the Rose and to escape!"

All round him was a garden set thick with rose-trees in myriads of blossom, rose behind rose as far as the eye could reach, and the fragrance of them lay like a heavy curtain of sleep upon the senses. Noodle,

beginning to feel drowsy, stretched out his hand in haste to the nearest flower, lest in a little while he should be no more than a part of the giant's dream. "O beloved Heart of Melilot!" he cried, and crushed his fingers upon the stem.

The whole bough crackled and sprang away at his touch; the Rose turned upon him, screaming and spouting fire; a noise like thunder filled all the air. Every rose in the garden turned and spat flame at where he stood. His face and his hands became blistered with the heat.

Leaping upon the back of his Plough, he cried, "Carry me to the borders of the garden where there are open spaces! The price of the Princess is upon my head!"

The Plough bounded this way and that, searching for some outlet by which to escape. It flew in spirals and circles, it leaped like a flea, it burrowed like a mole, it ploughed up the rose-trees by the roots. But so soon as it had passed they stood up unharmed again, and to whatever point of refuge the Plough fled, that way they all turned their heads and darted out vomitings of fire.

In vain did Noodle summon the Well-folk to his aid; his crystal shot forth fountains of water that turned into steam as they rose, and fell back again, scalding him.

Then with two deaths threatening to devour him, he brandished the ring, calling upon the Fire-eaters for their aid.

They laughed as they came. "Here is food for you!" he cried. "Multiply your appetites about me, or I shall be consumed in these flames!"

"Brandish again!" cried they—the same seven whom he had fed. "We are not enough; this fire is not quenchable."

Noodle brandished till the whole garden swarmed with their kind. One fastened himself upon every rose, a gulf opposing itself to a torrent. All sight of the conflagration disappeared; but within there went a roaring sound, and the bodies of the Fire eaters crackled, growing large and luminous the while.

"Do your will quickly and begone!" cried the Fire-eaters. "Even now we swell to bursting with the pumping in of these fires!"

Noodle seized on a rose to which one hung, sucking out its heats. He tugged, but the strong fibres held. Then he locked himself to the back of the Plough, crying to it and caressing its speed with all names under heaven, and beseeching it in the name of Melilot to break free. And the Plough giving but one plunge, the Rose came away into Noodle's hand, panting and a prisoner. All blushing it grew and radiant, with a soft inner glow, and an odour of incomparable sweetness. He seemed to see the heart of Melilot beating before him.

But now there came a blast of fire behind him, for the Fire-eaters had disappeared, and all was whirling and shaken before his eyes; and the Plough sped desperately over earthquake and space. For the plucking of the Rose had awakened the giant from his sleep; and the dream shrivelled and spun away in a whirl of flame-coloured vapours. Leaping into clear day out of the unravelment of its mists, Noodle found himself and his Plough launching over an edge

of precipice for a downward dive into space. The giant's hair, standing upright from his head in the wrath and horror of his awakening, made a forest ending in his forehead that bowered them to right and to left. Quitting it they slid ungovernably over the bulge of his brow, and went at full spurt for the abyss.

Dexterously the Plough steered its descent, catching on the bridge and furrowing the ridge of the nose ; nine leagues were the duration of a second.

The giant, thinking some venomous parasite was injuring his flesh, aimed, and a moment too late had thumped his fist upon the place. But already the Plough skirting the amazed opening of his mouth was lost in the trammels of his beard. Thence, as it escaped the rummaging of his fingers, it flew scouring his breast, and inflicted a flying scratch over the regions of his abdomen. Then, still believing it to be the triumphal procession of a flea, he pursued it to his thigh, and mistaking the shadow for the substance allowed it yet again to escape. At his kneecap there was but a hair's-breadth between Noodle and the weight of his thumb ; but thereafter the Plough out-distanced his every effort, and, with Noodle preserved whole and alive, sped fast and far, bearing the Burning Rose to the heart of the beloved Melilot.

The crone was aware of his coming before she heard him, or saw the gleam of his Plough running beam-like over the land. From her seat by the Princess's bower she clapped her hands, and springing to his neck ere he alighted : " A long way off, and a long time off," she cried, " I knew what for-

tune was with you; for when you plucked off the Rose, and bore it out of the heart of the dream, the scent of it filled the world; and I felt the sweetness of youth once more in my blood."

Then she led him to the Princess, and bade him lay the Rose in her breast, that her heart might be won back into the world. Looking at her face again, Noodle saw how memory had made it more beautiful than ever, and how between her lips had grown the tender parting of a smile. Then he laid the Rose where the movement of the heart should be; and presently under the white breast rose the music of its beating.

"Ah!" cried the old nurse, weeping for happiness, "now her heart that loved me is come back, and I can listen all day to the sound of it! You have brought memory to her, you have brought love; now bring breath, and the awakening of her five senses. Surely the light of her eyes will be your reward!"

VI

THE CAMPHOR-WORM

"TELL me quickly of the Camphor-Worm," cried the youth as he feasted his eyes on the Princess's loveliness, made more unendurable by the awakening within of love. "Where and what is it?" "It is not so far as was the way to the Burning Rose," answered the crone; "an hour on the back of the Plough shall bring it near to

you ; but the danger and difficulty of this quest is more, not less. For to reach the Camphor-Worm you need to be a diver in deep waters, whose weight crushes a man ; and to touch its lips you must master the loathing of your nature ; and to carry away its breath you must have strength of will and endurance beyond what is mortal." "You trouble me with things I need not know," cried Noodle. "Tell me," he said, "how I may reach the Camphor-Worm ; and of it and its ways."

"By this path, and by that," said the old woman, pointing him, "go on till you come to the thick waters of the Bitter Lake ; they are blacker than night, and their weight is heavier than lead, and in the depths dwells the Camphor-Worm. Once a year, when the air is sweetest with the scents of summer, she rises to breathe, lifting her black snout through the surface of the waters. Then she draws fresh air into her lungs, flavoured with leaves and flowers, and after she has breathed it in she lets go the last bubble of the breath she drew from the summer of the year before ; and it is this bubble of breath alone that will give back life to the five senses of Princess Melilot. But the Worm's time for rising is far ; and how you shall bear the weight in the depths of those waters, or make the Worm give up the bubble before her time, or at last bear back the bubble to lay it on the lips of the Princess so that she may wake,—these are things I know not the way of, for to my eyes they seem dark with difficulty and peril."

Then Noodle, opening the petals of the Burning Rose as it lay upon the heart of Melilot, drew out

honey from its centre, filling his hand with the golden crumblings of fragrance; and he leapt upon the Galloping Plough, urging it in the way the Princess's nurse had pointed out to him. As they went he caressed it with all the names under heaven, stroking it with his hand and praising it for the delicacy of its steering: saying, "O my moonbeam, if thou wouldst save the life of thy master, or restore the five senses of the Princess Melilot, thou must surpass thyself to-day. Listen, thou heaven-sent limb, thou miracle of quicksilver, and have a long mind to my words; for in a short while I shall have no speech left in me till the thing be done, and the deliverance, from head to feet, of my Beloved accomplished."

Even while he spoke they came to the edge of the Bitter Lake—a small pool, but its waters were blacker than night, and its heart heavier than lead. Then Noodle leapt down from the Plough, and caressed it for the last time, saying: "Set thy face for the garden where the Princess Melilot is; and when I am come back to thee speechless out of the Lake and am striding thee once more, then wait not for a word but carry me to her with more speed than thou hast ever mustered to my aid till now; go faster than wind or lightning or than the eye of man can see! So, by good fortune, I may live till I reach her lips; but if thou tarry at all I am a dead man. And when thou art come to Melilot set thy share beneath the roots of her feet, and take her up to me out of the ground. Do this tenderly, but abate not speed till it be done!"

Then the youth put into his mouth the honey of

the Burning Rose, and into his lips the Sweetener, and stripped himself as a bather to the pool. And the Plough, remembering its master's word, turned and set its face to where lay the garden with Melilot waiting to be relieved of her enchantment. Whereat Noodle, bowing his head, and blessing it with lips of farewell, turned shortly and slid down into the blackness of the lake.

The weight of that water was like a vice upon his limbs, and around his throat, as he swam out into the centre of the pool. As he went he breathed upon the water, and the scent of the honey of the Burning Rose passing through the Sweetener made an incomparable fragrance, gentle, and subtle, and wooing to the senses.

When he came to the middle of the lake he stayed breathing full breaths, till the air deepened with fragrance around him. Presently underneath him he felt the movement of a great thing coming up from the bottom of the pool. It touched his feet and came grazing along his side ; and all at once shuddering and horror took hold upon him, for his whole nature was filled with loathing of its touch.

Out of the pool's surface before him rose a great black snout, that opened, showing a round hole. Then he thought of Melilot and her beauty laid fast under a charm, and drawing a full breath he laid his lips containing the ring, the Sweetener, to the lips of the Worm.

The Worm began to breathe. As the Worm drank the air out of him, he drew in more through his nostrils, and more and more, till the great gills were filled and satisfied.

Then the Worm let go the last bubble of air which remained from the year before, and had lain ever since in its body, by which alone life could be given back to the five senses of Melilot. Then drawing in its head it lowered itself once more to the bottom of the pool; and Noodle, feeling in his mouth the precious globule of air, fastened his lips upon it and shot out for shore.

Against the weight of those leaden waters a longing to gasp possessed him; but he knew that with the least breath the bubble would be lost, and all his labour undone. Not too soon his feet caught hold of the bank, and drew him free to land. He cast himself speechless across the back of the Galloping Plough and clung.

The Plough gathered itself together and sprang away through space. Remembering its master's word it showed itself a miracle of speed; like lightning became its flight.

The eye of Noodle grew blind to the passing of things; he could take no count of the collapsing leagues. More and more grew the amazingness of the Plough's leaps, things only to be measured by miles, and counted as joltings on the way; while fast to the back of it clung Noodle, and endured, praying that shortness of breath might not overmaster him, or the check of his lungs give way and burst him to the emptiness of a drum. His senses rocked and swayed; he felt the gates of his resolve slackening and forcing themselves apart; and still the Galloping Plough plunged him blindly along through space.

But now the shrill crying of the crone struck in

upon his ears, and he stretched open his arms for the accomplishment of the deliverance. Even in that nick of time was the end of the thing brought about; for the Plough, guiding itself as a thread to the needle's eye, gave the uprooting stroke to the white feet of Melilot; and Noodle, swooning for the last gasp, saw all at once her beauty swaying level to his gaze and her body bending down upon his.

Then he fastened his lips upon hers, and loosed the bubble from his mouth; and panting and sobbing themselves back to life they hung in each other's arms. She warmed and ripened in his embrace, opening upon him the light of her eyes; and the greatness and beauty of the reward abashed him and bore him down to earth.

He heard the old crone clucking and crowing, like a hen over its egg, of the happiness that had come to her old years; till recognising the youth's state she covered him over with a cloak amid exclamations of astonishment.

The Princess saw nothing but her lover's face and the happy feasting of his eyes. She bent her head nearer and nearer to his, and the story of what he had done became a dream that she remembered, and that waking made true. "O you Noodle," she said, laughing, "you wise, wise Noodle!" And then everything was finished, for she had kissed him!

So Noodle and the Princess were married, and came to the throne together and reigned over a happy land. The Fire-eaters were their friends, and the gifts of fortune were theirs. The Gallop-

ing Plough made all the waste places fertile; and the water of the Thirsty Well rose and ran in rivers through the land; and over the walls of their palace, where they had planted it, grew the flower of the Burning Rose.

THE RAT-CATCHER'S DAUGHTER

ONCE upon a time there lived an old rat-catcher who had a daughter, the most beautiful girl that had ever been born. Their home was a dirty little cabin ; but they were not so poor as they seemed, for every night the rat-catcher took the rats he had cleared out of one house and let them go at the door of another, so that on the morrow he might be sure of a fresh job.

His rats got quite to know him, and would run to him when he called ; people thought him the most wonderful rat-catcher, and could not make out how it was that a rat remained within reach of his operations.

Now anyone can see that a man who practised so cunning a roguery was greedy beyond the intentions of Providence. Every day, as he watched his daughter's beauty increase, his thoughts were : " When will she be able to pay me back for all the expense she has been to me ? " He would have grudged her the very food she ate, if it had not been necessary to keep her in the good looks which were some day to bring him his fortune. For he was greedier than any gnome after gold.

Now all good gnomes have this about them : they love whatever is beautiful, and hate to see harm happen to it. A gnome who lived far away underground below where stood the rat-catcher's house, said to his fellows : " Up yonder is a man who has a daughter ; so greedy is he, he would sell her to

the first comer who gave him gold enough! I am going up to look after her."

So one night, when the rat-catcher set a trap, the gnome went and got himself caught in it. There in the morning, when the rat-catcher came, he found a funny little fellow, all bright and golden, wriggling and beating to be free.

"I can't get out!" cried the little gnome. "Let me go!"

The rat-catcher screwed up his mouth to look virtuous. "If I let you out, what will you give me?"

"A sack full of gold," answered the gnome, "just as heavy as myself—not a pennyweight less!"

"Not enough!" said the rat-catcher. "Guess again!"

"As heavy as you are!" cried the gnome, beginning to plead in a thin, whining tone.

"I'm a poor man," said the rat-catcher; "a poor man mayn't afford to be generous!"

"What is it you want of me?" cried the gnome.

"If I let you go," said the rat-catcher, "you must make me the richest man in the world!" Then he thought of his daughter: "Also you must make the king's son marry my daughter; then I will let you go."

The gnome laughed to himself to see how the trapper was being trapped in his own avarice as, with the most melancholy air he answered: "I can make you the richest man in the world; but I know of no way of making the king's son marry your daughter, except one."

"What way?" asked the rat-catcher.

"Why," answered the gnome, "for three years your daughter must come and live with me underground, and by the end of the third year her skin will be changed into pure gold like ours. And do you know any king's son who would refuse to marry a beautiful maiden who was pure gold from the sole of her foot to the crown of her head?"

The rat-catcher had so greedy an inside that he could not believe in any king's son refusing to marry a maiden of pure gold. So he clapped hands on the bargain, and let the gnome go.

The gnome went down into the ground, and fetched up sacks and sacks of gold, until he had made the rat-catcher the richest man in the world. Then the father called his daughter, whose name was Jasomé, and bade her follow the gnome down into the heart of the earth.

It was all in vain that Jasomé begged and implored; the rat-catcher was bent on having her married to the king's son. So he pushed, and the gnome pulled, and down she went; and the earth closed after her.

The gnome brought her down to his home under the hill upon which stood the town. Everywhere round her were gold and precious stones; the very air was full of gold dust, so that when she remained still it settled on her hands and her hair, and a soft golden down began to show itself over her skin. So there in the house of the gnome sat Jasomé, and cried; and, far away overhead, she heard the days come and go, by the sound of people walking and the rolling of wheels.

The gnome was very kind to her; nothing did

he spare of underground commodities that might afford her pleasure. He taught her the legends of all the heroes that have gone down into earth, and been forgotten, and the lost songs of the old poets, and the buried languages that once gave wisdom to the world: down there all these things are remembered.

She became the most curiously accomplished and wise maiden that ever was hidden from the light of day. "I have to train you," said the gnome, "to be fit for a king's bride!" But Jasomé, though she thanked him, only cried to be let out.

In front of the rat-catcher's house rose a little spring of salt water with gold dust in it, that gilded the basin where it sprang. When he saw it, he began rubbing his hands with delight, for he guessed well enough that his daughter's tears had made it; and the dust in it told him how surely now she was being turned into gold.

And now the rat-catcher was the richest man in the world: all his traps were made of gold, and when he went rat-hunting he rode in a gilded coach drawn by twelve hundred of the finest and largest rats. This was for an advertisement of the business. He now caught rats for the fun of it, and the show of it, but also to get money by it; for, though he was so rich, ratting and money-grubbing had become a second nature to him; unless he were at one or the other, he could not be happy.

Far below, in the house of the gnome, Jasomé sat and cried. When the sound of the great bells ringing for Easter came down to her, the gnome said: "To-day I cannot bind you; it is the great

rising day for all Christians. If you wish, you may go up, and ask your father now to release you."

So Jasomé kissed the gnome, and went up the track of her own tears, that brought her to her father's door. When she came to the light of day, she felt quite blind; a soft yellow tint was all over her, and already her hair was quite golden.

The rat-catcher was furious when he saw her coming back before her time. "Oh, father," she cried, "let me come back for a little while to play in the sun!" But her father, fearing lest the gilding of her complexion should be spoiled, drove her back into the earth, and trampled it down over her head.

The gnome seemed quite sorry for her when she returned; but already, he said, a year was gone—and what were three years, when a king's son would be the reward?

At the next Easter he let her go again; and now she looked quite golden, except for her eyes, and her white teeth, and the nails on her pretty little fingers and toes. But again her father drove her back into the ground, and put a heavy stone slab over the spot to make sure of her.

At last the third Easter came, and she was all gold.

She kissed the gnome many times, and was almost sorry to leave him, for he had been very kind to her. And now he told her about her father catching him in the trap, and robbing him of his gold by a hard bargain, and of his being forced to take her down to live with him, till she was turned into gold, so that she might marry the king's son.

"For now," said he, "you are so compounded of gold that only the gnomes could rub it off you."

So this time, when Jasomé came up once more to the light of day, she did not go back again to her cruel father, but went and sat by the roadside, and played with the sunbeams, and wondered when the king's son would come and marry her.

And as she sat there all the country-people who passed by stopped and mocked her; and boys came and threw mud at her because she was all gold from head to foot—an object, to be sure, for all simple folk to laugh at. So presently, instead of hoping, she fell to despair, and sat weeping, with her face hidden in her hands.

Before long the king's son came that road, and saw something shining like sunlight on a pond; but when he came near, he found a lovely maiden of pure gold lying in a pool of her own tears, with her face hidden in her hair.

Now the king's son, unlike the country-folk, knew the value of gold; but he was grieved at heart for a maiden so stained all over with it, and more, when he beheld how she wept. So he went to lift her up; and there, surely, he saw the most beautiful face he could ever have dreamed of. But, alas! so discoloured—even her eyes, and her lips, and the very tears she shed were the colour of gold! When he could bring her to speak, she told him how, because she was all gold, all the people mocked at her, and boys threw mud at her; and she had nowhere to go, unless it were back to the kind gnome who lived underground, out of sight of the sweet sun.

So the prince said, "Come with me, and I will take you to my father's palace, and there nobody shall mock you, but you shall sit all your days in the sunshine, and be happy."

And as they went, more and more he wondered at her great beauty—so spoiled that he could not look at her without grief—and was taken with increasing wonder at the beautiful wisdom stored in her golden mind; for she told him the tales of the heroes which she had learned from the gnome, and of buried cities; also the songs of old poets that have been forgotten; and her voice, like the rest of her, was golden.

The prince said to himself, "I shut my eyes, and am ready to die loving her; yet, when I open them, she is but a talking statue!"

One day he said to her, "Under all this disguise you must be the most beautiful thing upon earth! Already to me you are the dearest!" and he sighed, for he knew that a king's son might not marry a figure of gold.

Now one day after this, as Jasomé sat alone in the sunshine and cried, the little old gnome stood before her, and said, "Well, Jasomé, have you married the king's son?"

"Alas!" cried Jasomé, "you have so changed me: I am no longer human! Yet he loves me, and, but for that, he would marry me."

"Dear me!" said the gnome. "If that is all, I can take the gold off you again: why, I said so!"

Jasomé entreated him, by all his former kindness, to do so for her now.

"Yes," said the gnome, "but a bargain is a

bargain. Now is the time for me to get back my bags of gold. Do you go to your father, and let him know that the king's son is willing to marry you if he restores to me my treasure that he took from me; for that is what it comes to."

Up jumped Jasomé, and ran to the rat-catcher's house. "Oh, father," she cried, "now you can undo all your cruelty to me; for now, if you will give back the gnome his gold, he will give my own face back to me, and I shall marry the king's son!"

But the rat-catcher was filled with admiration at the sight of her, and would not believe a word she said. "I have given you your dowry," he answered; "three years I had to do without you to get it. Take it away, and get married, and leave me the peace and plenty I have so hardly earned!"

Jasomé went back and told the gnome. "Really," said he, "I must show this rat-catcher that there are other sorts of traps, and that it isn't only rats and gnomes that get caught in them! I have given him his taste of wealth; now it shall act as pickle to his poverty!"

So the next time the rat-catcher put his foot out of doors the ground gave way under it, and, snap!—the gnome had him by the leg.

"Let me go!" cried the rat-catcher; "I can't get out!"

"Can't you?" said the gnome. "If I let you out, what will you give me?"

"My daughter!" cried the rat-catcher; "my beautiful golden daughter!"

"Oh no!" laughed the gnome. "Guess again!"

"My own weight in gold!" cried the rat-catcher, in a frenzy; but the gnome would not close the bargain till he had wrung from the rat-catcher the promise of his last penny.

So the gnome carried away all the sacks of gold before the rat-catcher's eyes; and when he had them safe underground, then at last he let the old man go. Then he called Jasomé to follow him, and she went down willingly into the black earth.

For a whole year the gnome rubbed and scrubbed and tubbed her to get the gold out of her composition; and when it was done, she was the most shiningly beautiful thing you ever set eyes on.

When she got back to the palace, she found her dear prince pining for love of her, and wondering when she would return. So they were married the very next day; and the rat-catcher came to look on at the wedding.

He grumbled because he was in rags, and because he was poor; he wept that he had been robbed of his money and his daughter. But gnomes and daughters, he said, were in one and the same box; such ingratitude as theirs no one could beat.

THE TRAVELLER'S SHOES

ALONG while ago there lived a young cobbler named Lubin, who, when his father died, was left with only the shop and the shoe-leather out of which to make his fortune. From morning to night he toiled, making and mending the shoes of the poor village folk; but his earnings were small, and he seemed never able to get more than three days ahead of poverty.

One day, as he sat working at his window-bench, the door opened, and in came a traveller. He had on a pair of long red shoes with pointed ends; but of one the seams had split, so that all his toes were coming out of it.

The stranger, putting up one foot after the other, took off both shoes, and giving that one which wanted cobbling to Lubin, he said: "To-night I shall be sleeping here at the inn; have this ready in good time to-morrow, for I am in haste to go on!" And having said this he put the other shoe into his pocket, and went out of the door barefoot.

"What a funny fellow," thought Lubin, "not to make the most of one shoe when he has it!" But without stopping to puzzle himself he took up the to-be-mended shoe and set to work. When it was finished he threw it down on the floor behind him, and went on working at his other jobs. He meant to work late, for he had not enough money yet to get himself his Sunday's dinner; so when

darkness shut in he lighted a rushlight and cobbled away, thinking to himself all the while of the roast meat that was to be his reward.

It came close on midnight, and he was just putting on the last heel of the last pair of shoes when he was aware of a noise on the floor behind him. He looked round, and there was the red shoe with the pointed toe, cutting capers and prancing about by itself in the middle of the room.

"Peace on earth!" exclaimed Lubin. "I never saw a shoe do a thing so tipsy before!" He went up and passed his hand over it and under it, but there was nothing to account for its caperings; on it went, up and down, toeing and heeling, skipping and sliding, as if for a very wager. Lubin could even tell himself the name of the reel and the tune that it was dancing to, for all that the other foot was missing. Presently the shoe tripped and toppled, falling heel up upon the floor; nor, although Lubin watched it for a full hour, did it ever start upon a fresh jig.

Soon after daybreak, when Lubin had but just opened his shutters and sat himself down to work, in came the traveller, limping upon bare feet, with the shoe's fellow pointing its red toe out of his pocket. "Oh, so," he said, seeing the other shoe ready mended and waiting for him, "how much am I owing you for the job?"

"Just a gold piece," said Lubin, carelessly, carrying on at his work.

"A gold piece for the mere mending of a shoe!" cried the stranger. "You must be either a rogue or a funny fellow."

"Neither!" said Lubin, "and for mending a shoe my charge is only a penny; but for mending *that* shoe, and for all the worry and temptation to make it my own and run off with it—a gold piece!"

"To be sure, you are an honest fellow," said the traveller, "and honesty is a rare gift; though, had you made off with it, I should have soon caught you. Still, you were not so wise as to know that, so here's your gold piece for you." He pulled out a big bag of gold as he spoke, pouring its contents out on to the window bench.

"That is a lot of money for a lonely man to carry about," said Lubin. "Are you not afraid?"

"Why, no," answered the man. "I have a way, so that I can always follow it up even if I lose it." He took two of the gold pieces, and dropped one into the sole of each shoe as he was putting them on. "There!" said he, "now, if any man steal my money, I need only wait till it is midnight; and then I have but to say to my shoes 'Seek!' and up they jump, with me in them, and carry me to where my stolen property is, were it to the world's end. It is as if they had the nose and sagacity of a pair of bloodhounds. Ah, son of a cobbler, had you run off with the one I should have very soon caught you with the other; for if one walks the other is bound to follow. But, as you were honest, we part friends; and I trust God may bring you to fortune." Then the traveller did up his bag of gold, nodded to the cobbler from the doorway, and was gone.

Lubin laid down his work, and went off to the

inn. "Did anything happen here last night?" he asked.

"Nothing of much note," answered the innkeeper. "Three travelling fiddlers were here, and afterwards a man came in barefoot, but with a red shoe sticking out of his pocket. I thought of turning the fellow away, till he let me see the colour of his gold. Presently the fiddlers started to play and the other man to drink. At first when they called on him to dance he excused himself for his feet's sake; but presently, what with the music and the liquor, he got so lively in his head that he pulled on his one shoe and danced like three ordinary men put together."

"What time was that?" asked Lubin.

"Getting on for midnight," answered the innkeeper.

"Ah!" said Lubin, and went home thinking much on the way.

Towards evening he found that he had run out of leather, and must go into the town, ten miles off, to buy more. "Now my gold piece comes in handy," thought he; so he locked up the house, put the key in his pocket, and set out.

Though it was the season of long days it was growing dark when he came to a part of the road that led through the wood; but being so poor a man he had no fear, nor thought at all about the robbers who were said to be in those parts. But as he went, he saw all at once by the side of the road two red spikes sticking up out of a ditch, their bright colour making them plain to the eye. He came quite near and saw that they were two red shoes with pointed toes;

and then he saw more clearly that along with them lay the traveller, his wallet empty and with a dagger stuck through his heart.

The cobbler's son was as sorry as he could be. "Alas, poor soul," thought he, "what good are the shoes to you now? Now that thieves have killed you and taken away your gold, surely I do no harm if I give an honest man your shoes!" He stooped down, and was about taking them off when he saw the eyes of the dead man open. The eyes looked at him as if they would remind him of something; and at once, when he loosed hold of the shoes, they seemed satisfied. Then he remembered, and thought to himself, "The world has many marvels in it; I will wait till midnight and see."

For over three hours he kept watch by the dead man's side. "Only last night," he said to himself, "this poor fellow was dancing as merry a measure as ever I saw, for the half of it surely I saw; and now!" Then he judged that midnight must be come, so he bent over the shoes and whispered to them but one word.

The dead man stood up in his shoes and began running. Lubin followed close, keeping an eye on him, for the shoes made no sound on the earth. They ran on for two hours, till they had come to the thickest part of the forest; then some way before them Lubin began to see a light shining. It came from a small square house in a court-yard, and round the court-yard lay a deep moat; only one narrow plank led over and up to the entrance.

The red shoes, carrying the dead man, walked over, and Lubin followed them. When they were at the

other side they turned, facing towards the plank that they had crossed, and Lubin seemed to read in the dead man's eye what he was to do.

Then he turned and lifted the plank away from over the moat, so that there was no longer any entrance or exit to the place. Through the window of the house he could see the three fiddlers quarrelling over the dead man's gold.

The red shoes went on, carrying their dead owner, till they got to the threshold, and there stopped. Then Lubin came and clicked up the latch, and pushed open the door, and in walked the dead man with the dagger sticking out of his heart

The three fiddlers, when they saw that sight, dropped their gold and leapt out of the window; and as they fled, shrieking, thinking to cross the moat by the plank-bridge that was no longer there, one after the other they fell into the water, and, clutching each other by the throat, were drowned.

But the red shoes stayed where they were, and, tilting up his feet, let the traveller go gently upon the ground; and when Lubin held down the lantern to his face, on it lay a good smile, to tell him that the dead man thanked him for all he had done.

So in the morning Lubin went and fetched a priest to pray for the repose of the traveller's soul, and to give him good burial; and to him he gave all the dead man's money, but for himself he took the red shoes with the pointed toes, and set out to make his fortune in the world.

Walking along he found that however far he went he never grew tired. When he had gone on for more

than a hundred miles, he came to the capital where the King lived with his Court.

All the flags of the city were at half-mast, and all the people were in half-mourning. Lubin asked at the first inn where he stopped what it all meant.

"You must indeed be a stranger," said his host, "not to know, for 'tis now nearly a year since this trouble began; and this very night more cause for mourning becomes due."

"Tell me of it, then," said Lubin, "for I know nothing at all."

"At least," returned the innkeeper, "you will know how, a little more than a year ago, the Queen, who was the most beautiful woman in the world, died, leaving the King with twelve daughters, who, after her, were reckoned the fairest women on earth, though the King says that all their beauty rolled into one would not equal that of his dead wife; and, indeed, poor man, there is no doubt that he loved her devotedly during her life, and mourns for her continually now she is dead."

"Only a small part of all this have I known," said Lubin.

"Well, but at least," said the innkeeper, "you will have heard how the Princesses were famed for their hair; so beautiful it was, so golden, and so long! And now, at every full moon, one of them goes bald in a night; and bald her head stays as a stone, for never an inch of hair grows on it again; and with her hair all her beauty goes pale, so that she is but the shadow of her former self—a thin-blooded thing, as if a vampire had come and sucked out half her life. Yes; ten months this has hap-

pened, and ten of the Princesses have lost their looks and their hair as well; and now only the Princess Royal and the youngest of all remain untouched; and doubtless one of them is to lose her crop to-night."

"But how does it happen?" cried Lubin. "Is no one put to keep watch, to guard them from the thing being done?"

"Ah! you talk, you talk!" said the innkeeper. "How? The King has offered half his kingdom to anyone who can tell him how the mischief is done; and the other half to the man who will put an end to it. To put it shortly, if you believe yourself a clever enough man, you may have the King for your father-in-law, with the pick of his daughters for your bride, and be his heir and lord of all when he dies!"

"For such a reward," said Lubin, "has no man made the attempt?"

"Aye, one a month; every time there has been some man fool enough to think himself so clever; and he has been turned out of the palace next day with his ears cropped."

"I will risk having my ears cropped," said Lubin; for his heart was sorry for the young Princesses, and the vanishing of their beauty. So he went up and knocked at the gates of the palace.

They went and told the King that a new man had come willing and wanting to have his ears cropped on the morrow. "Well, well," said the King, "let the poor fool in!" for indeed he had given up all hope. From the King Lubin heard the whole story over again. The old man sighed so it took him whole hours to tell it.

"I would be glad to be your son," said Lubin, when the King had ended; "but I would like better to make you rid of your sorrow."

"That is kind of you," said the King. "Perhaps I will only crop one of your ears to-morrow."

"When may one see the Princesses?" asked Lubin.

"They will be down to supper, presently," answered the King; "then you shall see them, what there is left of them."

Though it was reckoned that the next day Lubin would have to be drummed out of the palace with his ears cropped short, on this day he was to be treated like an honoured guest. When they went in to supper the King made him sit upon his right hand.

The twelve Princesses came in, their heads bowed down with weeping; all were fair, but ten of them were thin and pale, and wore white wimples over their heads like nuns; only the Princess Royal, who was the eldest, and Princess Lyneth, who was the youngest, had gold hair down to their feet, and were both so shiningly beautiful that the poor cobbler was altogether dazzled by the sight of them.

The King looked out of the window and said: "Heigho! There is the full moon beginning to rise." Then they all said grace and sat down.

But when the viands were handed round, all the Princesses sat weeping into their plates, and seemed unable to eat anything. For the pale and thin ones said: "To-night another of our sisters will lose her golden hair and her good looks, and be like us!" Therefore they wept.

And Lyneth said: "To-night, either my dear

sister or myself will fall under the spell!" Therefore she wept more than the other ten. But the Princess Royal sat trembling, and crying:

"To-night I know that the curse is to fall upon me, and me only!" Therefore she wept more than all.

Lubin sat, and watched, and listened, with his head bent down over his golden plate. "Which of these two shall I try most to save?" he thought. "How shall I test them, so as to know? If I could only tell which of them was to lose her hair to-night, then I might do something."

He saw that the youngest sister cried so much that she could eat nothing; but the Princess Royal, between her bursts of grief, picked up a morsel now and again from her plate, and ate it as though courage or despair reminded her that she must yet strive to live.

When the meat-courses were over, the King said to the Princesses: "I wish you would try to eat a little pudding! Here is a very promising youth, who is determined by all that is in him that harm shall happen to none of you to-night."

"To-morrow he will be sent away with his ears cut short!" said Princess Lyneth; and her tears, as she spoke, ran down over the edge of her plate on to the cloth.

When supper was over the Princess Royal came up to Lubin, and said: "Do not be angry with my sister for what she said! It has only been too true of many who came before; to-night, unless you do better than them all, I shall lose my hair. It has been a wonder to me how I have been spared so long,

seeing that I am the eldest, and, as some will have it, the fairest. Will you keep a good guard over me to-night, as though you knew for certain that I am to be the one this time to suffer ? "

" I will guard you as my own life," said Lubin, " if you will but do as I ask you."

" Pledge yourself to me, then, in this cup ! " said she, and lifted to his lips a bowl of red wine. Over the edge of it her eyes shone beautifully ; he drank gazing into their clear depth.

" Where am I to be for the night," he asked of the King, " so that I may watch over the two Princesses ? "

The King took him to a chamber with two further doors that opened out of it. " Here," said the King, " you are to sleep, and in the inner rooms sleep the Princess Royal and the Princess Lyneth. There is no entrance or exit to them but through this ; therefore, when you are here with your door bolted, one would suppose that you had them safe. Alas ! ten other men have tried like you to ward off the harm, and have failed ; and so to-day I have ten daughters with no looks left to them, and no hair upon their heads."

As they were speaking, the two Princesses, with their sisters, came up to bed. And the pale ones, wearing their white wimples, came and kissed the golden hair of the other two, crying over it, and saying, " To one of you we are saying good-bye ; to-morrow one of you will be like us ! " Then they went away to their sleeping-place, and the Princess Royal and Lyneth kissed each other, and parted weeping, each into her own chamber.

" Watch well over us ! " said Lyneth to Lubin,

as she passed through. "Watch over me!" said the Princess Royal. And then the two doors were closed.

Lubin said to the King, "Could I now see the two Princesses, without being seen by them, it would help me to know what to do."

"Come down to my cabinet," said the King. "I have an invisible cap there, that I can lend you if you think you can do any good with it." So they went; and the King reached down the cap from the wall and gave it to Lubin.

"Now, good-night, your Majesty," said Lubin; "I will do for you all I can."

The King answered, "Either you shall be my son-in-law to-morrow, or you shall have no ears. My wishes are with you that the former state may be yours."

Lubin went into his chamber and closed and bolted the door; then he put the bed up against it. "Now, at least," he thought, "there are three of us, and no more!" He put on his invisible cap, and going softly to the Princess Royal's door, opened it and peeped in.

She stood up before her glass, combing out her long gold hair, and smiling proudly because of its beauty. She gathered it up by all its ends and kissed it; then, letting it fall, she went on combing as before.

Lubin went out, closing the door again; then he took off his cap and knocked, and presently he heard the Princess Royal saying, "Come in!" She was lying down upon the bed, squeezing her eyes with her hands.

"Princess," he said, "I will watch over you like my own life, if you will do what I bid you. I am but a poor man, and the best that I can do is but poor; but I think, if you will, I can save your head from becoming as bare as a billiard ball."

The Princess asked him how.

"You know," said he, "that to-night something is to happen to one of you" ("To me!" said the Princess), "and all your hair will be stolen in such a way that nothing will ever make it grow again. See, here I have a pair of common scissors; let me but cut your hair close off all over your head, and then who can steal it? For a few months you will be a fright, but it can grow again."

"I think you are a silly fellow!" said the Princess. "Better for you to get to bed, and have your ears cropped quietly in the morning! After all, it may be my sister's turn to lose her hair, not mine. I shall not make myself a fright for a year of my life in order to save you."

"If you think so poorly of my offer," said Lubin, "I had better go to bed and sleep, and not trouble the Princess Lyneth at all with it."

"No, indeed!" said the Princess Royal. "Go to bed and sleep, poor fool!" And, in truth, Lubin was feeling so sleepy that he could hardly keep open his eyes.

Then he left her, and, pulling the invisible cap once more over his head, crept softly into Princess Lyneth's chamber.

She was standing before her glass with all her beautiful hair flowing down from shoulders to feet; and tears were falling fast out of her eyes as she

kept drawing her hair together in her hands, kissing and moaning over it.

Then Lubin went out again, and, taking off his cap, knocked softly at the door.

"Come in!" said the Princess; and when he went in she was still standing before the glass weeping and moaning for her beautiful hair, that might never see another day. On the bed was lying a white wimple, ready for her to put on when her head was become bald.

"Princess," said Lubin, very humbly, "will you help me to save your beautiful hair, by doing what I ask?"

"What is it that you ask?" said she.

"Only this," he answered; "I am a poor man, and cannot do much for you, but only my best. To-night you or your sister must lose your hair; and we know that afterwards, if that happen, it can never grow again. Now, come, here I have a common pair of scissors; if I could cut your hair quite short, in a few months it will grow again, and there will be nothing to-night that the Fates can steal. Will you let me do this for you in true service?"

The Princess looked at him, and looked at her glass. "Oh, my hair, my hair!" she moaned. Then she said, "What matters it? You mean to be good to me, and a month is the most that my fortune can last. If I do not lose it to-night, I lose it at the next full moon!" Then she shut her eyes and bade him take off all he wished. When he had finished, she picked up the wimple and covered her head with it; but Lubin took up

the long coil of gold hair and wound it round his heart.

He knelt down at her feet. "Princess," he said, "be sure now that I can save you! Only I have one other request to make."

"What is that?" asked the Princess.

He took off one of his red shoes with the pointed toes. "Will you, for a strange thing, put on this shoe and wear it all to-night in your sleep? And in the morning I will ask you for it again."

The Princess promised faithfully that she would do so. Even before he had left the room she had put foot in it, promising that only he should take it off again.

Lubin's eyes were shut down with sleep as he groped his way to bed; he lay down with the other red shoe upon his foot. "Watch for your fellow!" he said to it; and then his senses left him and he was fast asleep.

In the middle of the night, while he was deep in slumber, the red shoe caught him by the foot and yanked him out of bed; he woke up to find himself standing in the middle of the room, and there before him stood the two doors of the inner chambers open; through that of the Princess Royal came a light. He heard the Princess Lyneth getting very softly out of her bed, and presently she stood in the doorway, with her hands out and her eyes fast shut; and the red shoe was on one foot, and the white wimple on her head. Little tears were running down from under her closed lids; and she sighed continually in her sleep. "Have pity on me!" she said.

She crossed slowly from one door to the other; and Lubin, putting on his invisible cap, crept softly after her. The Princess Royal's chamber was empty, but her glass was opened away from the wall like a door, and beyond lay a passage and steps. At the top of the steps was another door, and through it light came, and the sound of a soft voice singing.

Princess Lyneth, knowing nothing in her sleep, passed along the passage and up the steps till she came to the further doorway. Looking over her shoulder Lubin saw the Princess Royal sitting before a loom. In it lay a great cloth of gold, like a bride's mantle, into which she was weaving the last threads of her skein. Close to her side lay a pair of great shears that shone like blue fire; and while she sang they opened and snapped, keeping time to the music she made.

Without ever turning her head the Princess Royal sat passing her fingers along the woof and crying:

> "Sister, sister, bring me your hair,
> Of our Mother's beauty give me your share.
> You must grow pale, while I must grow fair!"

And while she was so singing, Lyneth drew nearer and nearer, with her eyes fast shut, and the white wimple over her head. "Have pity on me!" she said, speaking in her sleep.

As soon as the Princess Royal heard that she laughed for joy, and catching up the great flaming shears, turned herself round to where Lyneth was

standing. Then she opened the shears, and took hold of the wimple, and pulled it down.

All in a moment she was choking with rage, for horrible was the sight that met her eye. "Ah! cobbler's son," cried she, "you shall die for this! To-morrow not only shall you have your two ears cropped, but you shall die: do not be afraid!"

Lubin looked at her and smiled, knowing how little she thought that he heard her words. "Ah! Princess Royal," he said to himself, "there is another who should now be afraid, but is not."

Then for very spite the Princess began slapping her sister's face. "Ah! wicked little sister," she cried, "you have cheated me this time! But go back and wait till your hair has grown, and then my gown of gold shall be finished, although this once you have been too sly!" She threw down the shears, and drove her sister back by stair and passage, and through the looking-glass door at the other end.

Lubin following, stayed first to watch how by a secret spring the Princess Royal closed the mirror back into the wall; then he slipped on before, and taking his cap off, lay down on his bed pretending to be fast asleep. He heard Princess Lyneth return to her couch, and then came the Princess Royal and ground her teeth at him in the darkness.

Presently she, too, returned to her bed and lay down; and an hour after Lubin got up very softly and went into her chamber. There she lay asleep, with her beautiful hair all spread out upon the pillow; but Lubin had Princess Lyneth's hair wound round his heart. He touched the secret spring, so that the mirror opened to him, and he

passed through toward the little chamber where stood the loom.

There hung the cloth of gold, all but finished; beside it the shears opened and snapped, giving out a blue light. He took up the shears in his hand, and pulled down the gold web from the loom, and back he went, closing the mirror behind him.

Then he came to the Princess Royal as she lay asleep; and first he laid the cloth of gold over her, and saw how at once she became ten times more fair than she was by rights, as fair almost as her dead mother, lacking one part only. But her beauty did not win him to have pity on her.

"There can be thieves, it seems, in high places!" he said; and with that he opened the shears over her head and let them snap: then all her long hair came out by the roots, and she lay white and withered before his eyes, and as bald as a stone.

He gathered up all her hair with one hand, and the cloth of gold with the other, and went quietly away. Then, hiding the shears in a safe place, first he burnt the Princess Royal's hair, till it became only a little heap of frizzled cinders; and after that he went to the chamber of the ten Princesses, whose hair and whose sweet youth had been stolen from them. There they lay all in a row in ten beds, with pale, gentle faces, asleep under their white wimples.

He went to the first, and, laying the cloth of hair over her, cried:

"Sister, sister, I bring you your hair,
Of your Mother's beauty I give you your share.
One must grow pale, but you must grow fair!"

And as he said the words one part of the cloth unwove itself from the rest, and ran in ripples up the coverlet, and on to the pillow where the Princess's head lay. There it coiled itself under the wimple, a great mass of shining gold, and the face of the Princess flushed warm and lovely in her sleep.

Lubin passed on to the next bed, and there uttered the same words; and again one part of the web came loose, and wound itself about the sleeper's face, that grew warm and lovely at its touch. So he went from bed to bed, and when he came to the end there was no more of the web left.

He went back into his own chamber, laughing in his heart for joy, and there he dropped himself between the sheets and fell into a sound slumber.

He was awakened in the morning by the King knocking and trying to get into the room. Lubin pulled back the bed, and in came the King with a mournful countenance.

"Which of them is it?" said he.

"Go and ask them!" said Lubin.

The King went over and knocked at the Princess Royal's door: the knocking opened her eyes. Lubin heard her suddenly utter a yell. "Ah! now she has looked at herself in the glass," thought he.

"What is the matter?" called the King. "Come out and let me look at you!" But the Princess Royal would not come out. She ran quick to her mirror, and touched the secret spring. "At

least," she thought, "though fiends have robbed me of all my beauty, I can get it back by wearing the cloth woven from my sisters' hair!" She skipped along the passage and up the steps to the little chamber where the loom was.

The King, getting no answer, went across and knocked at Lyneth's door; she came out, all fresh in her beauty, but wearing upon her head the wimple. "Ah!" said the King dolorously; and he snipped his fingers at Lubin.

Lubin laughed out. "But look at her face!" he said. "Surely she is beautiful enough?"

The Princess lifted up her wimple, and showed the King her hair all shorn beneath. "That was my doing," said Lubin; "'twas the way of saving it."

"What a Dutchman's remedy!" cried the King; and just then the Princess Royal's door flew open.

She came out tearing herself to pieces with rage; her face was pale and thin, and her head was as bare as a billiard ball. "Have that clown of a cobbler killed!" she cried in a passion. "That fool, that numbskull, that cheat! Have him beheaded, I say!"

"No, no, I am only to have one of my ears cropped off!" said Lubin, looking hard at her all the time.

"I am not at all sure," said the King. "You have done foolishly and badly, for not only have you let the disease go on, but your very remedy is as bad. Two heads of hair gone in one night! You had better have kept away. If the Prin-

cesses wish it, certainly I will have you put to death."

"Will you not see the other Princesses too?" asked Lubin. "Let them decide between them whether I am to live or die!"

The King was just going to call for them, when suddenly the ten Princesses opened the door of their chamber, and stood before him shining like stars, with all their golden hair running down to their feet.

"Now put me to death!" said Lubin; and all the time he kept his eye upon the Princess Royal, who turned flame-coloured with rage.

"No, indeed!" cried the King. "Now you must be more than pardoned! You see, my dears," he said to Lyneth and the Princess Royal, "though you have suffered, your sisters have recovered all that they lost. They are ten to two; and I can't go back on arithmetic; I am bound to do even more than pardon him for this."

"Indeed and indeed yes!" replied the Princess Lyneth. "He has done ten times more than we thought of asking him!" And she went from one to another of her recovered sisters, kissing their beautiful long hair for pure gladness of heart. But when she came to the Princess Royal, she kissed her many times, and stooped down her face upon her shoulder, and cried over her.

"Tell me now," said the King to Lubin, "for you are a very wonderful fellow, how did it all happen?"

Lubin looked at the Princess Royal; after all he could not betray a lady's secret. "I cannot tell

you," he said ; " if I did, there would be a death in the family."

" Well," said the King, " however you may have done it, I own that you have earned your reward. You have only to choose now which of my daughters is to make you my son-in-law. From this day you shall be known as my heir." He ranged all the Princesses in line, according to their ages. " Now choose," said the King, " and choose well ! "

Lubin went up to the Princess Royal. " I won't have you ! " he said, looking very hard at her ; and the Princess Royal dropped her eyes. Then he went on to the next. " Sweet lady," he said, " I dare not ask one with such beautiful hair as yours to marry me, who am a poor cobbler's son." But all the while he had the Princess Lyneth's hair bound round his heart.

He went on from one to another, and of each he kissed the hand saying that she was too fair to marry him.

He came to Lyneth and knelt down at her feet. " Lyneth," he said, " will you give the poor cobbler back his shoe ? "

Lyneth, looking in his eyes, saw all that he meant. " And myself in it," she said, " for you love me dearly ! " She put her arms round his neck, and whispered, " You marry me because I am a fright, and have no hair ! "

But Lubin said, " I have your hair all wound round my heart, making it warm ! "

So they were married, and lived together more happily than cobbler and princess ever lived in the

world before. And the cobbler dropped mending shoes: only his wife's shoes he always mended. Very soon Lyneth's hair grew again, more shining and beautiful than before; but the Princess Royal remained pale, and thin, and was bald to the day of her death.

THE ROOTED LOVER

MORNING and evening a ploughboy went driving his team through a lane at the back of the palace garden. Over the hedge the wind came sweet with the scents of a thousand flowers, and through the hedge shot glimpses of all the colours of the rainbow, while now and then went the sheen of silver and gold tissue when the Princess herself paced by with her maidens. Also above all the crying and calling of the blackbirds and thrushes that filled the gardens with song, came now and then an airy exquisite voice flooding from bower to field; and that was the voice of the Princess Fleur-de-lis herself singing.

When she sang all the birds grew silent; new flowers came into bud to hear her and into blossom to look at her; apples and pears ripened and dropped down at her feet; her voice sang the bees home as if it were evening: and the ploughboy as he passed stuck his face into the thorny hedge, and feasted his eyes and ears with the sight and sound of her beauty.

He was a red-faced boy, red with the wind and the sun: over his face his hair rose like a fair flame, but his eyes were black and bold, and for love he had the heart of a true gentleman.

Yet he was but a ploughboy, rough-shod and poorly clad in a coat of frieze, and great horses went at a word from him. But no word from him might move the heart of that great Princess; she never noticed the sound of his team as it jingled by, nor

saw the dark eyes and the bronzed red face wedged into the thorn hedge for love of her.

"Ah! Princess," sighed the ploughboy to himself, as the thorns pricked into his flesh, "were it but a thorn-hedge which had to be trampled down, you should be my bride to-morrow!" But shut off by the thorns, he was not a whit further from winning her than if he had been kneeling at her feet.

He had no wealth in all the world, only a poor hut with poppies growing at the door; no mother or father, and his own living to get. To think at all of the Princess was the sign either of a knave or a fool.

No knave, but perhaps a fool, he thought himself to be. "I will go," he said at last, "to the wise woman who tells fortunes and works strange cures, and ask her to help me."

So he took all the money he had in the world and went to the wise woman in her house by the dark pool, and said, "Show me how I may win Princess Fleur-de-lis to be my wife, and I will give you everything I possess."

"That is a hard thing you ask," said the wise woman; "how much dare you risk for it?"

"Anything you can name," said he.

"Your life?" said she.

"With all my heart," he replied; "for without her I shall but end by dying."

"Then," said the wise woman, "give me your money, and you shall take your own risk."

Then he gave her all.

"Now," said she, "you have but to choose any flower you like, and I will turn you into it; then, in the night I will take you and plant you in the

palace garden; and if before you die the Princess touches you with her lips and lays you as a flower in her bosom, you shall become a man again and win her love; but if not, when the flower dies you will die too and be no more. So if that seem to you a good bargain, you have but to name your flower, and the thing is done."

"Agreed, with all my heart!" cried the plough-boy. "Only make me into some flower that is like me, for I would have the Princess to know what sort of a man I am, so that she shall not be deceived when she takes me to her bosom."

He looked himself up and he looked himself down in the pool which was before the wise woman's home; at his rough frieze coat with its frayed edges, his long supple limbs, and his red face with its black eyes, and hair gleaming at the top.

"I am altogether like a poppy," he said, "what with my red head, and my rough coat, and my life among fields which the plough turns to furrow. Make a poppy of me, and put me in the palace garden and I will be content."

Then she stroked him down with her wand full couthly, and muttered her wise saws over him, for she was a wonderful witch-woman; and he turned before her very eyes into a great red poppy, and his coat of frieze became green and hairy all over him, and his feet ran down into the ground like roots.

The wise woman got a big flower-pot and a spade; and she dug him up out of the ground and planted him in the pot, and having watered him well, waited till it was quite dark.

As soon as the pole-star had hung out its light she

got across her besom, tucked the flower-pot under her arm, and sailed away over hedge and ditch till she came to the palace garden.

There she dug a hole in a border by one of the walks, shook the ploughboy out of his flower-pot, and planted him with his feet deep down in the soil. Then giving a wink all round, and a wink up to the stars, she set her cap to the east, mounted her besom, and rode away into thin space.

But the poppy stood up where she had left him taking care of his petals, so as to be ready to show them off to the Princess the next morning. He did not go fast asleep, but just dozed the time away, and found it quite pleasant to be a flower, the night being warm. Now and then small insects ran up his stalks, or a mole passed under his roots, reminding him of the mice at home. But the poppy's chief thought was for the morning to return; for then would come the Princess walking straight to where he stood, and would reach out a hand and gather him, and lay her lips to his and his head upon her bosom, so that in the shaking of a breath he could turn again to his right shape, and her love would be won for ever.

Morning came, and gardeners with their brooms and barrows went all about, sweeping up the leaves, and polishing off the slugs from the gravel-paths. The head gardener came and looked at the poppy. "Who has been putting this weed here?" he cried. And at that the poppy felt a shiver of red ruin go through him; for what if the gardener were to weed him up so that he could never see the Princess again?

All the other gardeners came and considered him,

twisting wry faces at him. But they said, "Perhaps it is a whim of the Princess's. It's none of our planting." So after all they let him be.

The sun rose higher and higher, and the gardeners went carrying away their barrows and brooms; but the poppy stood waiting with his black eye turned to the way by which the Princess should come.

It was a long waiting, for princesses do not rise with the lark, and the poppy began to think his petals would be all shrivelled and old before she came. But at last he saw slim white feet under the green boughs and heard voices and shawm-like laughter and knew that it was the Princess coming to him.

Down the long walks he watched her go, pausing here and there to taste a fruit that fell or to look at a flower that opened. To him she would come shortly, and so bravely would he woo her with his red face, that she would at once bend down and press her lips to his, and lift him softly to her bosom. Yes, surely she would do this.

She came; she stopped full and began looking at him: he burned under her gaze. "That is very beautiful!" she said at last. "Why have I not seen that flower before? Is it so rare, then, that there is no other?" But, "Oh, it is too common!" cried all her maids in a chorus; "it is only a common poppy such as grows wild in the fields."

"Yet it is very beautiful," said the Princess; and she looked at it long before she passed on. She half bent to it. "Surely now," said the poppy, "her lips to mine!"

"Has it a sweet smell?" she asked. But one of

her maids said, "No, only a poor little stuffy smell, not nice at all!" and the Princess drew back.

"Alas, alas," murmured the poor poppy in his heart, as he watched her departing, "why did I forget to choose a flower with a sweet smell? then surely at this moment she would have been mine." He felt as if his one chance were gone, and death already overtaking him. But he remained brave; "At least," he said, "I will die looking at her; I will not faint or wither, till I have no life left in me. And after all there is to-morrow." So he went to sleep hoping much, and slept late into the morning of the next day.

Opening his eyes he was aware of a great blaze of red in a border to his right. Ears had been attentive to the words of Princess Fleur-de-lis, and a whole bed of poppies had been planted to gratify her latest fancy. There they were, in a thick mass burning the air around them with their beauty. Alas! against their hundreds what chance had he?

And the Princess came and stood by them, lost in admiration, while the poppy turned to her his love-sick eye, trying to look braver than them all. And she being gracious, and not forgetful of what first had given her pleasure, came and looked at him also, but not very long; and as for her lips, there was no chance for him there now. Yet for the delight of those few moments he was almost contented with the fate he had chosen—to be a flower, and to die as a flower so soon as his petals fell.

Days came and went; they were all alike now, save that the Princess stayed less often to look at him or the other poppies which had stolen his last

chance from him. He saw autumn changes coming over the garden ; flowers sickened and fell, and were removed, and the nights began to get cold.

Beside him the other poppies were losing their leaves, and their flaming tops had grown scantier ; but for a little while he would hold out still ; so long as he had life his eye should stay open to look at the Princess as she passed by.

The sweet-smelling flowers were gone, but the loss of their fragrant rivalry gave him no greater hopes : one by one every gorgeous colour dropped away ; only when a late evening primrose hung her lamp beside him in the dusk did he feel that there was anything left as bright as himself to the eye. And now death was taking hold of him, each night twisting and shrivelling his leaves ; but still he held up his head, determined that, though but for one more day, his eye should be blessed by a sight of his Princess. If he could keep looking at her he believed he should dream of her when dead.

At length he could see that he was the very last of all the poppies, the only spot of flame in a garden that had gone grey. In the cold dewy mornings cobwebs hung their silvery hammocks about the leaves, and the sun came through mist, making them sparkle. And beautiful they were, but to him they looked like the winding-sheet of his dead hopes.

Now it happened just about this time that the Prince of a neighbouring country was coming to the Court to ask Princess Fleur-de-lis' hand in marriage. The fame of his manners and his good looks had gone before him, and the Princess being bred to the understanding that princesses must marry for the

good of nations according to the bidding of their parents, was willing, since the King her father wished it, to look upon his suit with favour. All that she looked for was to be wooed with sufficient ardour, and to be allowed time for a becoming hesitancy before yielding.

A great ball was prepared to welcome the Prince on his arrival; and when the day came, Princess Fleur-de-lis went into the garden to find some flower that she might wear as an adornment of her loveliness. But almost everything had died of frost, and the only flower that retained its full beauty was the poor bewitched poppy, kept alive for love of her.

"How wonderfully that red flower has lasted!" she said to one of her maidens. "Gather it for me, and I will wear it with my dress to-night."

The poppy, not knowing that he was about to meet a much more dangerous rival than any flower, thrilled and almost fainted for bliss as the maid picked him from the stalk and carried him in.

He lay upon Princess Fleur-de-lis' toilet-table and watched the putting on of her ballroom array. "If she puts me in her breast," he thought, "she must some time touch me with her lips; and then!"

And then, when the maid was giving soft finishing touches to the Princess's hair, the beloved one herself took up the poppy and arranged it in the meshes of gold. "Alas!" thought the poppy, even while he nestled blissfully in its warm depths, "I shall never reach her lips from here; but I shall dream of her when dead; and for a ploughboy, that surely is enough of happiness."

So he went down with her to the ball, and could

feel the soft throbbing of her temples, for she had not yet seen this Prince who was to be her lover, and her head was full of gentle agitation and excitement to know what he would be like. Very soon he was presented to her in state. Certainly he was extremely passable: he was tall and fine and had a pair of splendid mustachios that stuck out under his nostrils like walrus-tusks, and curled themselves like ram's horns. Beyond a slight fear that these might sweep her away when he tried to kiss her, she favoured his looks sufficiently to be prepared to accept his hand when he offered it.

Then music called to them invitingly, and she was led away to the dance.

As they danced the Prince said: "I cannot tell how it is, I feel as if someone were looking at me."

"Half the world is looking at you," said the Princess in slight mockery. "Do you not know you are dancing with Princess Fleur-de-lis?"

"Beautiful Princess," said the Prince, "can I ever forget it? But it is not in that way I feel myself looked at. I could swear I have seen somewhere a man with a sunburnt face and a bold black eye looking at me."

"There is no such here," said the Princess; and they danced on.

When the dance was over the Prince led her to a seat screened from view by rich hangings of silken tapestry; and Princess Fleur-de-lis knew that the time for the wooing was come.

She looked at him; quite clearly she meant to say "Yes." Without being glad, she was not sorry. If he wooed well she would have him.

"It is strange," said the Prince, "I certainly feel that I am being looked at."

The Princess was offended. "I am not looking at you in the least," she said slightingly.

"Ah!" replied the other, "if you did, I should lose at once any less pleasant sensation; for when your eyes are upon me I know only that I love you—you, Princess, who are the most beautiful, the most radiant, the most accomplished, the most charming of your sex! Why should I waste time in laying my heart bare before you? It is here; it is yours. Take it!"

"Truly," thought the Princess, "this is very pretty wooing, and by no means ill done." She bent down her head, and she toyed and she coyed, but she would not say "Yes" yet.

But the poppy, when he heard the Prince's words, first went all of a tremble, and then giving a great jump fell down at the Princess's feet. And she, toying and coying, and not wishing to say "Yes" yet, bent down and taking up the poppy from where it had fallen, brushed it gently to and fro over her lips to conceal her smiles, and then tucking her chin down into the dimples of her neck began to arrange the flower in the bosom of her gown.

As she did so, all of a sudden a startled look came over her face. "Oh! I am afraid!" she cried. "The man, the man with the red face, and the strong black eyes!"

"What is the matter?" demanded the Prince, bending over her in the greatest concern.

"No, no!" she cried, "go away! Don't touch me! I can't and I won't marry you! Oh, dear!

oh, dear! what is going to become of me?" And she jumped up and ran right away out of the ball-room, and up the great staircase, where she let the poppy fall, and right into her own room, where she barred and bolted herself in.

In the palace there was the greatest confusion: everybody was running about and shaking heads at everybody else. "Heads and tails! has it come to this?" cried the King, as he saw a party of serving-men turning out a ploughboy who by some unheard of means had found his way into the palace. Then he went up to interview his daughter as to her strange and sudden refusal of the Prince.

The Princess wrung her hands and cried: she didn't know why, but she couldn't help herself: nothing on earth should induce her to marry him.

Then the King was full of wrath, and declared that if she were not ready to obey him in three days' time, she should be turned out into the world like a beggar to find a living for herself.

So for three days the Princess was locked up and kept on nothing but bread and water; and every day she cried less, and was more determined than ever not to marry the Prince.

"Whom do you suppose you are going to marry then?" demanded the King in a fury.

"'I don't know," said the Princess, "I only know he is a dear; and has got a beautiful tanned face and bold black eyes."

The King felt inclined to have all the tanned faces and bold black eyes in his kingdom put to death: but as the Princess's obstinacy showed no signs of abating, he ended by venting all his anger upon her.

So on the third day she was clothed in rags, and had all her jewellery taken off her, and was turned out of the palace to find her way through the world alone.

And as she went on and on, crying and wondering what would become of her, she suddenly saw by the side of the road a charming cottage with winter poppies growing at the door. And in the doorway stood a beautiful man, with a tanned face and bold black eyes, looking as like a poppy as it was possible for a man to look.

Then he opened his arms: and the Princess opened her arms: and he ran, and she ran. And they ran and they ran and they ran, till they were locked in each other's arms, and lived happily ever after.

THE WOOING OF THE MAZE

ONCE upon a time there lived a beautiful Princess named Rosemary who had all she wanted in the world but freedom. She had riches, and power, and glory without end; but above and beyond all these things, her beauty was like the sound of a trumpet.

If she lifted the veil from her face, or looked out from her window at morning as she combed her bright hair, the whole plain at her feet became like an army of banners, and the hillsides dark with the galloping of her suitors.

Rejected potentates went clamouring to the four winds of heaven, of her charm and of her cruelty; and the saying went that she had paved the floor of her palace with the hearts which she had broken.

But she was weary, was weary of saying "No" to wooers she did not love; and often when alone she would cry that her riches and her power and her glory might vanish away from her, and her beauty too, save so much of it as would win her the heart of the one man she loved, and leave her to be tended by his hands, as was her sweet namesake rosemary.

One day at noon, when it was the middle of summer, she was lying on a couch in the palace watching how the flies' wings threw a network on the air as they made love to each other and played. It seemed to her so like the net that the swarm of her suitors threw round her day by day, that she caught one of the flies, and to make it more like herself, sprinkled

it with gold dust so that it shone ; then she let it go. But to her surprise all the other flies avoided it, and the gilded one went about solitary and alone.

" Oh ! why then," she cried, " am I not left free like yonder fly sprinkled with gold ? "

Just then under the window a young gardener at his work among the flowers began singing ; and this is what he sang :

" What will I do for my rose of the roses ?
Build her a window that looks at the sky ;
Fashion her bower with a door that so closes,
No man shall open or enter but I."

The Princess waited till the words of the song were ended ; then a smile broke over her face ; she took up her guitar, and with musically skilled fingers played over the air as it had been sung. One by one the clear notes sprang through the open window and fell upon the ears of the listener on the green lawn below. Also her voice took up the air and sang :

" Thus, in her heart, saith thy rose of the roses,
' Build me a window with heaven for its brow ;
Fashion my bower with a door that so closes,
No man shall open or enter but thou.' "

That same day the Princess, sitting upon her throne and having crown and sceptre in her hands, caused the gardener to be called into her presence. The courtiers thought it was very strange that the Princess should have a thing of such importance to make known to a gardener that it was necessary for

her to receive him with crown and throne and sceptre, as if it were an affair of state.

To the gardener, when he stood before her, she said, "Gardener, it is my wish that there should be fashioned for me a very great maze, so intricate and deceitful that no man who has not the secret of it shall be able to penetrate therein. Inmost is to be a little tower and fountains, and borders of sweet-smelling flowers and herbs. But the man who fashions this maze and has its secret must remain in it for ever lest he should betray his knowledge to others. So it is my will that you should devise such a maze for my delight, and be yourself the prisoner of your own craft when it is accomplished."

The gardener lifted his head where he knelt, and saw the Princess sitting with eyes fast shut and hard-bitten lips, and hands down loose on either side of her, from which had fallen the crown and sceptre they had held. Then he answered her, "Princess, by all the might of my craft I will be, and it shall be so as you wish."

Now the Princess gave it out to the world that, being so wooed, she was minded to put all men who required her hand to a great test, that so he who deserved her most might win her. Therefore at such and such a time she made it to be known that she would withdraw herself from all men's eyes to the centre of a great maze strongly knit round by magic, and that whoever desired her beauty and could penetrate through all the deceits and dangers of that maze should possess herself and her lands and her power, and live in glory of his achievement.

Day by day, out of her palace window, she watched the great maze as it grew. Wondrously it wound like a huge serpent, gathering into its fold many miles of country—wood and hill and valley, and great pits and caverns. And far within rose a small round tower about which stood fountains like silver willows blown by the wind; but the door no man could see, for mighty hedges and walls circled all ways about, cutting off what was below the eye, so that the inner garden lay hidden like a skylark's nest in the corn.

One day when the Princess asked, "How strong is this maze to be?" the gardener answered, "As strong as love." And when she asked, "How hard will its way be to find?" he answered, "As hard as is the foolishness of the kings and princes who shall seek thee therein." Then she laughed and was comforted in her heart when the day approached on which all the world was to be parted from her.

On that day a hundred suitors had gathered to the Court, eager to prove their prowess and win the most beautiful woman in all the world for a bride. At night the palace was ablaze from floor to roof, for there a great feast was held, at which sat Princess Rosemary, magnificent in her beauty and the splendour of her robes and crown. And all the kings and princes and lords bent round her with love and worship.

When the clocks struck midnight she rose, and all her jewels shone in the fashion of a star, so thickly clustered the eye might not discern one from other; but from heel to crown they clothed her as in a sheet of fire. She passed down the midst of the

hall, bowing both ways to the assembly in gracious farewell, and her train as it went from floor to floor was as a great retinue following her when she herself had passed forth.

She went from terrace to terrace of garden under great trees where torches and trombones hung, blown by the wind, till she came to the entrance of the maze. Then she drew out of her breast a small chart, and gazing thereon went as though fate-led out of sight and sound. And all the crowd standing without watched the mysterious jewelled train of her robe passing in after she was gone, as though itself knew the way it had to go and the windings that led into the very heart of the maze. A whispered tale went from mouth to mouth that he who had devised and fashioned the maze had disappeared—was dead, lest the secret should be betrayed. Some said "Poison"; some said nothing, but shook their heads darkly and seemed wise.

At the first dawn of day the hundred kings, princes, and knights went forth to the wooing of the maze, for there were many paths, and each one went his own way.

For many days the doors remained sealed and silent as a tomb, and the crowds that gathered daily to watch began dwindling away, and went back to resume their neglected trades. At last the countries whose kings did not return sent ambassadors with messages that became more and more urgent in demanding their presence. They spoke of the balance of thrones, and the encroachments of neighbouring powers, and the deaths of relatives. These

ambassadors went down to the various entrances at which their masters had been seen to go in, and thence shot arrows at a venture with the urgent messages attached to them. But yet none came to answer.

Then the ambassadors were summoned away, for new kings had seized on the vacant thrones, and the return of their predecessors became no longer expedient. People almost forgot at last to trouble their heads, save when fresh suitors came desirous of joining in the great wooing of the maze, the more by reason of its apparent dangers. Then indeed for a time gossips would wait and talk, but afterwards they went away.

Many years went by, and at last there came forth a knight with grizzled hair and bowed head. He walked in loops and circles, and his eyes slid from right to left over the ground at his feet. He seemed crazed, and stuttered when he spoke. They asked him how he had fared. He showed them many badges of other knights fastened about his shield and helmet. "I overthrew these," he said, "till I met one who said, 'I am Old Age: turn back!'"

They watched after him with his middle-aged stoop, till he had stumbled his way into his own country. Some remembered him as a gallant young knight fifteen years ago.

Yet the story went that the wondrous beauty of the Princess did not fade; and the people became proud of a legend that spread so great a distinction for their land, and would point to the maze and the far-off fountains, and say, "There

waits our beautiful Princess till one come worthy to woo her."

Twenty years had gone by when one day a goodly young Prince, with a smiling countenance, and two long lances slung over his back, made his appearance at the palace and demanded admittance to the maze. Half the population streamed out to meet him, for it was many years since the last wooer had come and vanished never to return. The country remembered its importance, and gave him a great welcome. "Look what long lances he has!" shouted the crowd. And then the doors of the maze closed on him, and they went back to their work.

When the Prince had made some way into the maze, he fastened his horse to a tree, took down his lances and—chopped off their points. Lo, and behold! he had turned them into stilts, great high stilts, so that by mounting them he could see far away over the windings of the maze into the very heart of it.

Far off he could see the silver glint of fountains like grey willows blown slantwise in the wind. That way with a pleasant tune in his heart he straddled merrily along. If he found himself in a blind alley, or being carried back by the windings of the road, he stood on one stilt and went "leg over" with the other; thus his goings prospered.

Here and there, he came upon dead men lying in their armour; some of them were quite old, others had long lances by their sides; they must have been hard of understanding and foolish. He passed them all by.

For the whole long day he travelled, till towards evening he came upon a little wood, and saw through the tree-boles the grey stones of the little tower, and felt on his face the spray of the fountains carried by the wind. Also he heard the sound of pleasant voices, and the stroke of a spade in the earth.

Free of the wood the path led straight on, till at the end of it, over a high hedge, lay a dainty bright garden. A man and a woman were bending together over a border of flowers. Their faces were close together, full of smiles as their hands gathered sprays of rosemary; their hair was wet with the drift of the fountains.

Both were in the early middle-age of life, the woman tall and broad-bosomed, her hair like a plaited crown of gold.

The man, as her face brushed his, laughed and began singing:

"What shall I do for my rose of the roses?
Build her a window that looks at the sky,
Fashion a door to her bower that so closes,
No man shall open or enter but I."

The Prince came and looked over the hedge; at the end of the song the gardener and his wife had raised themselves; the woman had her face resting on the man's shoulder, and her arms about his waist. As she stood, her eyes came straight upon the intruder, who hung a laughing head and shoulders over the garden hedge. Her mouth and eyes went wide open, but breath was wanting for speech. She pinched her husband to make him look round.

The Prince smiling, addressed them with the utmost courtesy, "Good Sir and Madam, can you tell me whether the Princess is at home?" As he spoke he lifted a stilt and planted it down on the flower-bed inside. One more stride and he was in. There was a sudden clapping of hands. "He's a humorist!" cried the gardener's wife.

"Please," said he, as he climbed down from his height and stood once more on his own feet, "please, I am come for the Princess; and I hope she is not tired of waiting, and is as beautiful, and as young, as report has led me to believe."

The gardener's wife laughed and ran into the tower. Presently from roof to floor it was filled with a great rustling sound, and all the windows shone with the colour of fire. Then out of the door came a lovely girl blazing with jewels and drawing behind her a wonderful great train. "Here is your Princess," said her mother. How beautiful she was, how radiant, how young! She came softly towards the Prince, laughing and holding out her hand. He took it, and as he did so the whole of the maze disappeared, and only the little tower with its fountains remained. So the young couple went back to the palace and were married, but the other couple stayed at home; and there they lived happily ever after.

THE MOON-FLOWER

PRINCESS BERENICE sat by a window of her father's palace, looking out of the Moon. In her hand she held a great white pearl, and smiled, for it was her mother's birthday gift. The chamber in which she sat was of pure silver, and in the floor was a small window by which she could see out of the Moon and right down on to the Earth, where the moonbeams were going. There it lay like a great green emerald; and wherever the clouds parted to let the moonbeams go through, she could see the tops of the trees, and broad fields with streams running by.

"Yonder is the land of the coloured stones," she said to herself, "that the merchants go down the moonbeams and bring home and sell." And as she bent lower and lower and gazed with curious eyes, the great pearl rolled from her hand and fell out of the Moon, and went slipping and sliding down a moonbeam, never stopping till it got to the Earth.

"My mother's pearl!" cried the Princess, "the most beautiful of all her pearls that she gave me. I must run down and bring it back; for if I wait it will be lost. And as to-night is the full-moon down there upon Earth, I can return before anyone finds out that I am gone."

The Earth was sparkling a brighter green under the approach of night. "Oh, land of the coloured stones!" cried the Princess; and, slipping through

the window, she stepped out of the Moon, and went running down the same moonbeam by which the pearl had fallen.

Night came; and the Earth and the Moon lay looking at each other in the midst of heaven, like an emerald and a pearl; but through the palace, and within, over all its gardens and terraces there began to be callings on the Princess Berenice; and presently there were heart-searchings and fear, for they found the empty room with its open window: and the Princess Berenice was not there.

Now, not long before this, upon our own Earth there had lived and died a King who had four sons, but only three kingdoms. So when he came to die he gave to each of his three eldest sons a kingdom apiece; but to the youngest, having nothing else left to give, he gave only a pair of travelling shoes, and said: "Wear these, and some day they will take you to fortune!"

So, when the King was dead, the young Prince wore the shoes night and day, hoping that some time or another they would take him to fortune. His brothers laughed at him, and said: "Our father was wise to play those old shoes off upon you! If it had been either of us we would have gone and bought ourselves an army and fought for a just share in the inheritance. But you seem pleased, so we ought to be."

Now one day the Prince went out hunting in the forest, and there, having become separated from all his friends, he thoroughly lost his way. Wherever he turned the wood seemed to grow denser, the thickets higher, and the solitude more than he

ever remembered before. Night came on, and, there being nothing else that he could do, he lay down and wrapped himself in his cloak and slept.

When he awoke it was day, but the woods were as still as death; no bird sang, and not a cricket chirped among the grass. As he sat up he noticed that the shoe was gone from his left foot, nor could he see it anywhere near. "'Tis the half of my inheritance gone!" he said to himself, and got up to search about him. But still no shoe could he find. At last he gave up the search as useless, and set off walking without it. Then as it seemed to him so ridiculous to go limping along with only one shoe on, he took off the remaining one, and threw it away, saying: "Go, stupid, and find your fellow!"

To the Prince's great astonishment, it set off at a rapid pace through the wood, all of its own accord. The Prince, barefoot except for his stockings, began to run after it.

Presently he found that he was losing his breath. "Hie, hie!" he called out, "not quite so fast, little leather-skins!" But the shoe paid him no heed and went on as before. It skipped through the grass and brushwood, as if a young girl's foot were dancing inside it; and whenever it came to a fallen tree, or a boulder of rock it was up and over with a jump like a grasshopper.

Before long the Prince's stockings were nothing but holes and tatters; as he ran they fluttered from his legs like ribbons. He had lost his hat, and his cloak was torn into patterns, and he felt from head to foot like a house all doors and windows. He

was almost on his last gasp when he saw that the shoe was making straight for a strange little house of green bronze, shut in by a high wall, and showing no windows; and in the middle of the wall was a bronze door shut fast. As he came near he found that outside, on the doorstep, stood his other shoe as if waiting to be let in. "So it was worth running for!" thought he; and then, putting on both shoes again, he began knocking at the door.

As he knocked the door opened. It opened in such a curious way, flat down like a swing-bridge or like the lid of a box. For some time he was half afraid to walk in on the top of it. Presently, however, he summoned up his courage and stepped across it.

The door closed behind him like a trap, and he found himself in a beautiful house; all its walls were hung with gold and precious stones, but everywhere was the emptiness and the silence of death.

He went from room to room seeking for any that lived there, but could see no one. In one place he found thrown down a fan of white feathers and pearl; and in another flowers, fresh plucked, lying close by a cushion dinted and hollowed, as though the weight of a head or arm had rested there. But beyond these there was no sign of a living thing to be found.

Through the windows he saw deep bowery gardens hemmed in by high walls, within which grew flowers of the loveliest kinds. All the paths were of smooth grass, and everywhere were the

traces of gentle handiwork; but still not a soul was to be seen.

It seemed to the Prince now and then that there was something in the garden which moved, distinct from the flowers, and shifting with a will of its own. Though the sun shone full down, casting clear shadows across the lawns, this that he saw was altogether misty and faint. Now it seemed like a feather blown to and fro in the wind, and now like broken gossamer threads, or like filmy edges of clouds melting away in the heat. Where it went the flowers moved as though to make way for it, swaying apart and falling together again as it passed.

The Prince watched and watched. He tired his eyes with watching, yet he could see no more; and no way could he find to the garden, for all the doors leading to it were locked fast and barred.

There was another strange thing he noticed which seemed to him to have no meaning. All over the garden, between the trees and the sky, was stretched a silver net, so fine that it showed only as a faint film against the blue; but a net for all that. Here and there, the light of the sun catching it, hung sparkling in its silver meshes. It was like the net that a gardener throws over strawberry beds or currant bushes to keep off the birds from the fruit. So was it with this net; through it no bird could enter the garden, and no bird that was in the garden could leave it.

All day the Prince had these two things before his eyes to wonder about, till the sun went down and it began to get dusk.

At the moment when the sun sank below the

earth there was a sound of opening doors all over the house. The Prince ran and found one of the doors leading into the garden wide open, and through it he could see the stir of leaves, and the deep colours of the flowers growing deeper in the dusk; only the evening primroses were lighting their soft lamps.

From a distant part of the garden came the sound of falling water, and a voice singing. As he approached he saw something shining against the dark leaves higher than the heads of the flowers; and before he well knew what he saw, he found before his eyes the most lovely woman that the mind of man could believe in.

In her hand hung a watering-can, with the water falling from it in sprays on to the flower beds beneath. Her head was bent far down, yet how she looked slender and tall! She was very pale, yet a soft light seemed to grow from her, the light of a new moon upon a twilight sky. And now the Prince heard clearly the sweet voice, and the words that she was singing:

"Listen, listen, listen,
O heart of the sea!
I am the Pearl of pearls
I am the Mother of pearls,
And the Mother of thee.
Glisten, glisten, glisten,
O bed of the sea!
Lost is the Pearl of pearls,
And all the divers for pearls
Are drowning for me."

He stood enchanted to hear her; but the words

of the song ended suddenly in a deep sigh. The singer lifted her head; her eyes moved like grey moths in the dusk, amid the whiteness of her face. At sight of him they grew still and large, widening with a quiet wonder. Then the beautiful face broke into smiles, and the Princess stretched out her hands to him and laughed.

"Have you come," she said, "to set me free?"

"To set you free?" asked the Prince.

"I am a prisoner," she told him.

"Alas, then!" answered the Prince, "I am a prisoner also, and can free no one; but were I now free to go wherever I would, I should be a prisoner still, for I have seen the face of the loveliest heart on earth!"

"Alas!" she sighed, "and can you not set me free?"

"Tell me," he said, "what makes you a prisoner here?"

She pointed to the net over their heads, to the walls that stood on all sides of them, and to the ground beneath their feet. "That," she said, "and that, and this."

"Who are you?" he asked, "and where do you come from? and whose power is it that now holds you captive?"

She led him on to a terrace, from which they could see out towards the west; and there lay the new Moon, low down in the sky. "Yonder," she said, pointing to it, "is my home!" She wept. "Shall I ever return to it?"

The Prince, gazing at her in wonder, cried, "Are you one of a Fairy race?"

"No, oh, no!" she sighed. "I am but mortal like yourself; only my home is there, while yours is here. We, who dwell in the Moon, are as you are, but the sun has greater power over us; the light of it falling on us makes us pale and unsubstantial, so that we weigh not so much as a gossamer and become transparent as thin fleeces of cloud. Then we can go where you cannot go, treading the light as it flies; but at sunset we regain our strength, and our bodies come to us again; and we are as you see me now—no different from yourselves, the inhabitants of the Earth."

"Tell me," said the Prince, "of yourself, and the dwellers in the Moon! Is it not cold there, and barren?"

She answered smiling, for the memory of her home was sweet to her, "Outside, the Moon is cold and barren; but within it is very warm and rich and fertile; more beautiful than any place I have seen on earth. It is there we live; and we have flocks, and herds, and woods, and rivers, and harbours, and seas. Also we have great cities built inside the Moon's crust, for the Moon is a great hollow shell, and we walk upon its inner surface and are warm. The sunlight comes to us through craters and clefts in the ground; and the beams of it are like solid pillars of gold that quiver and sway as they shoot upwards into the opal twilight of our world; and the shine and the warmth of it come to us, and colour the air above our heads; but we are safe from its full light falling on us, for the ground is between us and it. Only when we pass through to the outer side do we become pale and faint, a mere whisper of our former

selves. And then we are so light that if we step upon a moonbeam it will bear our weight ; and the moonbeam carries us swiftly as its own light travels, till it reaches the Earth : so we come. But to return there is another way."

And when the Prince asked her, she told him of the other way back into the Moon.

" When we wish to return," she went on " (for the falling light of a moonbeam cannot carry us back), we must go where there is a pool of still water and wait for the reflection of the Moon to fall on it ; and when the Moon is full, and throws its image into the water, then we dive down, and with our lips touch the reflection of its face, crying, ' Open, open to me, for I am a Moon-child ! ' And the Moon will open her face like a door of pearl, and let us pass in ; and when she draws her reflection out of the pool, we find ourselves once again among our own people and in our own land. Many of us have so come and so returned," she sighed deeply, " but I fear that I shall never again return."

Then the Prince asked her further whose power it was that held her captive ; and she told him how she had dropped the pearl that her mother had given her, and had come down seeking it. Then she said, " In the Moon we have many jewels, for we have opals and onyxes, and pearls and moonstones, but we have no rubies, or emeralds, or sapphires, or stones of a single colour, such as you have. Therefore, we have a passion for these things, and our merchants come down and bring them back to us at a great price.

" Now it chanced that in my search I came upon

a gnome who had dealings with our merchants and had many jewels to sell, and he, seeming to be kind, helped me until my pearl was found. Then he took me to see his own treasures; and, alas, while my eyes were feasting on the colours of the stones he showed to me, my poor beauty inflamed the avarice of his evil heart, and the desire to have me for his wife became great. So when I asked him the price of his jewels, he vowed that the only price at which he would let them go was that of my own hand in marriage. Alas, I am young and innocent, and without subtlety, nor did I know how great was his power and wickedness. As I laughed at his request his face grew dark with rage, and I saw that I had incurred the undying enmity of his cruel heart. And now for a whole year he has held me in his enchantment, striving to break me to his will by the length and weariness of my captivity; and lest search or any help should come for me from my father's people, he has covered me in with a net, and surrounded me with walls; and here there is no pool into which the full Moon may fall, and at the mere touch of my lips upon its face, open and draw me free from my enchantment, and back into the heart of my own land. Only yonder, in the corner of the garden is a deep well, where the Moon never shines; so there is no way here left for me by which I may get free."

"Does not the gnome ever come to see you in your captivity?" asked the Prince. "If so, I may by some means be able to entrap him, and force him to let you go."

"Twice in the year he has visited me," answered the Princess. "He comes up out of the ground

in the form of a Red Mole; but he looks at me wickedly and cunningly with the eyes of a man, seeming to say, 'Will you have me yet?' And when I shake my head he burrows under again, and is gone till another six months shall be past."

The Prince thought for a while and said, "I do not know whether I have the power or the wit to make you free; if love only were needed for the work, to-morrow would see you as free as a bird."

The Princess, between smiles and sighs, said, "I have been most lonely here; already you make my imprisonment seem less." Then she led him within doors, from room to room, showing him the splendours of her prison. Wherever they went, out of the floor before them rose burning jewels that hung hovering over their heads to light them as they passed; and when she struck her hands together, up from the ground rose a table covered with fruit and dainties of all sorts; and when she and the Prince had eaten, she clapped her hands again, and they disappeared by the same way that they had come.

The Prince was struck with admiration at the delicacy of these marvels. "When I think of the Red Mole, they sicken me!" said the Moon-Princess. The good youth used all his arts to cheer her, promising to devote himself, and if need be his life, to the task of setting her free. And now and then she laughed and was almost merry again, forgetting the walls that still held her spell-bound from her own people and her own land.

She showed the Prince a chamber where he might sleep; and so soft and warm was the couch after

his last hard night on the ground, that it was full day before he awoke. The Princess Berenice appeared before him misty and faint, for the sunlight threw a veil upon her beauty; but still as he looked at her he did not love her less, and it still seemed to him that hers was the face of the loveliest heart on earth.

All day he watched her drifting about the garden, seeming to feed herself on the scent of the flowers. In the evening, when the sun set, her body grew strong and her face shone out to him like the new Moon upon a twilight sky.

Then he drew water for her from the well, and watched her as she watered the flowers which were her only delight. Presently he said, "There is much water in the well, for the rope goes down into it many fathoms; and yet I find no bottom."

"Yes," answered the Princess, "I doubt not that the well is deep."

"Before many days are over," said the Prince, "the well shall become a pool."

The Princess wondered to hear him. "Is there," he went on, "no such thing as a spade for me to dig with?" Then she led him to a shed, where lay all the needed implements for gardening. So his eyes brightened, while he cried, "O, beautiful Princess Berenice, as I love you, before many weeks are over you shall be free!"

The next morning he arose very early, and in the centre of the garden, where the ground hollowed somewhat, he marked out a space and set to work to dig.

All day the Princess went to and fro, faint and pale

as a mist, watching him at his work. At dusk her beauty shone full upon him, and she said, "What is this that you are doing?" He answered, "What I am making shall presently become a pool; then when the pool is full, and the full Moon comes and shines on it, you shall go down into the water, and shall kiss the face of its reflection with your lips, and be free from your enchantment."

Princess Berenice looked long at him, and her eyes clung to his like soft moths in the gloom. "But you?" she said, "You are no Moon-child, and this will never set you free."

"Ever since I saw you," said the Prince, "I have not thought of freedom; my dearest wish is but to set you free."

The Princess gave him her hand. "And mine," she said, "my dearest wish henceforth is to set you free also. Yet I know but one way, and I cannot name it." She smiled tenderly on him, and bowed her face into the shadow of her hair.

The Prince caught her in his arms, "One way is my way!" he cried. "Your way," she said, "is my way." Then, when he had finished kissing her, she said, "Look, on my finger is a ring; this ring is for him to whom I give myself in marriage. Surely, it opens to him the heart of my own people, and he becomes one of us, a child of the Moon." She showed him an opal ring, full of fires. "If your way is my way," she said, "draw this off my finger, and put it upon your own, and take me to be your wife!"

So the Prince drew off the ring from her finger, and set it upon his own; and as he did so he felt indeed the heart of the Moon-people become his

own, and the love of the Moon strike root in him. Yet did the love of the Earth remain his as well, making it seem as if all the love in his heart had but doubled itself.

So he and the most beautiful Berenice were married there by the light of the new Moon, and all thought of sorrow or danger from the encirclement that bound them was lost in their great joy.

During the whole of the next day the Prince went on with his digging, making a broad shallow in the ground. "Before the full Moon comes," he said, "I will make it deep." And he worked on, refusing to take any rest.

The Princesss loved him more and more as she watched him; and his love for her daily increased, for every day, while the Moon grew full, her beauty shone in greater perfection and splendour. "Here," she said to him, "the coming of the full Moon is like the coming of Spring to me: I feel it in my blood. After the full Moon my beauty will wane and grow paler. But in my own land I do not feel these changes, for there it is always the full Moon." The Prince answered her, "To me your beauty, though it grows more, will not ever grow less."

At last, on the day before that of the full Moon, the pit which he had dug was broad and deep; then he began to fill it with water from the well. "To-morrow," he said to his wife, when the pool was nearly full, as she came and stood by his side at sunset in the full blaze of her beauty, "to-morrow we shall be free; and you will carry me away with you into your own land."

"I do not know," said the Princess; "I begin to

be afraid!" and she sighed heavily. "Any day the Red Mole may come: one day is not too soon for him to be here."

"But why need you fear him now?" asked the Prince. "Since you are married to me, you cannot be married to him."

"As to that," said she, "I fear that to have outwitted him will but make his malice all the greater against us!" Then she walked softly among the moonbeams, bathing her hands in them, and letting them fall upon the loveliness of her face; and as she stood in their light, tears rained down out of her eyes.

In the morning it seemed as if her happiness had returned. The Prince, as he toiled under the blazing sun, carrying water from the well to the pool, felt her moving by his side, and heard her light shadowy laughter when, just before sunset, the water flowed level to the pool's brink. And when dusk rose out of the grass, there she stood glowing with the full Moon of her beauty and leaning in all the light of her loveliness towards him.

The happy night drew round them; out of the East came the glow of the full Moon as it rose; soon, soon it would cross the tops of the trees and rest its face upon the quiet waters of the pool. They clung in each other's arms, entranced. "My beautiful," said the Prince, "shall we not take to your mother some of those jewels she loves—the green, and the red, and the blue, and the pearl which was hers, the quest of which has cost you so much?" He ran into one of the jewelled chambers where lay the pearl, and caught from the walls the largest

stones he could find. Quickly he went and returned, for the Moon was now fast cresting the avenues of the garden. He came bearing the jewels in his hands.

Princess Berenice stood no longer by the brink of the pool, though therein lay the image of the Moon's face, a circle of pale gold upon the water. "Berenice," called the Prince, and ran through the garden searching for her. "Berenice!" he cried by the well; but she was not there. "Berenice!" His voice grew trembling and weak, and quick fear took hold of him. "O, my beautiful, my beloved, where are you?"

Only the silence stood up to answer him. Under his feet ran a Red Mole.

It scampered across the grass, and disappeared through a burrow in the ground. Then the Prince knew that the worst had surely come, and that his Princess had been taken away from him. Where she was he could not know; within her former prison she was nowhere to be seen.

All night the Prince lay weeping by the brink of the pool, where she had last stood before his sight; the print of her dear feet still lay on the lawn where she had stayed waiting with him so long. "O, miserable wretch that I am!" he cried, kissing the trodden grass. "Now never again may I hope to behold you, or hear your dear voice!"

All the day following he wandered like a ghost from place to place, filling the empty garden with memories of her presence, and sighing over and over again the music of her name. All the flowers

glowed round him in their accustomed beauty; new buds came into life, and full blooms broke and fell; not a thing seemed to sorrow for her loss except himself. As for the flowers, he paid them little heed.

In his sleep that night a dream came to him, a dream as of something that whispered and laughed in his ear. Over and over again it seemed to be saying, "The Red Mole came, and the full Moon came, and the Princess jumped down into the water!" Then his heart knocked so loud for joy that he started awake, and saw the Red Mole scuffling away to its borrow in the ground.

Then he feared that the dream was but a thing devised to cheat his fancy, and get rid of him by making him go away and search for his Princess in the land of the Moon, by the way that she had told him. But he thought to himself, "If the Red Mole wants so much to get me away, it means that my beloved is somewhere near at hand. Is she in the well?" he began wondering; and as soon as it was light he went to where lay the well in its corner under the shadow of the wall. But though he searched long and diligently, there was no trace of her that he could find.

Yet every time he came near to the well sorrow seemed to take hold of him, and, mixed with it, a kind of joy, as though indeed the heart of his beloved beat in this place. Near to the well stood a tall flower with bowed head. It seemed to him the only one in the whole garden that had any share in his sorrow: he wondered if the flower had grown up to mark the sad place of her burial.

"O, my beloved Berenice, art thou near me now?" he murmured, heart-broken, one day as he passed by: then it seemed to him that all at once the flower stirred. He turned to look at it; it was like a sunflower, but white even to its centre, and its head kept drooping as if for pure grief. "Berenice, Berenice!" he wept, passing it.

At dusk he returned again; and now the flower's head was lifted up, and shone with a strange lustre. The Prince, as he went by on his way to the well, saw the flower turn its head, bending its face ever towards where he was. Then grief and joy stirred in his heart. "The flower knows where she is!" he said.

So he bent, whispering, "Where, then, is Berenice?" and the flower lifted its head, and hung quite still, looking at him.

Then the Prince whispered again, "The Red Mole came, and the full Moon came, and the Princess jumped down into the water?"

But the flower swayed its head from side to side, and the Prince found that it had answered "No."

Then he had it in his mind to ask of it further things; but, as he was about to speak, he beheld its face all brimming over with tears, that suddenly broke and fell down in a shower over its leaves.

At that his heart leaped, and his voice choked as he cried, "Art *thou* my beloved, my Berenice?" And all at once the flower swayed down, and leaned, and fell weeping against his breast.

So at last he knew! And joy and grief struggled together in him for mastery.

All that night he knelt with the flower's head upon his heart, stroking its soft leaves, and letting it rest between his hands; till, towards dawn, it seemed to him that peace was upon it and sleep.

All through the day it hung faint upon its stem; but when evening came it lifted its head and shone in moon-like beauty; and so deep for it was the Prince's love and compassion that he could hardly bear to be absent from its side one moment of the day or night.

And, when he was very weary, he lay down under its shadow to sleep; and the Moon-flower bent down and rested its head upon his face.

All night long in dreams Berenice came back to him. He seemed to hear how the Red Mole had come, and changed her to a rooted shape, lest the full Moon in the water should carry her away from him back into her own land. Yet it was only a dream, and the Prince could learn nothing there of the way by which he might set her free.

A month went by, and he said to his Flower, "To-night is the night of the full Moon: now, if I drew you from the ground, and carried you down, and called for the Moon's face to open to us, would you not be free from the enchantment, when you were come again to your own people?" But the Moon-flower shook its head, as if to bid him still wait and watch patiently.

Now, as the Prince came and went day by day, he began to notice that the Moon-flower had its roots in a small green mound, no bigger than a mole-hill; and he thought to himself, "surely that mound was not there at first: the Red Mole

must be down below at work!" So he watched it from day to day; and at last he knew for certain that, as time went on, the mound grew larger.

Month by month the mound upon which the Moon-flower had root increased in size; yet the Flower thrived, and its beauty shone brighter as each full Moon approached, so that at last the Prince's fear lest the Red Mole were working mischief against its life, passed away.

Once, on the night of a full Moon, as the Prince lay with his head upon Earth, and the Moon-flower bowed over his face, he heard under the mound a peal of silvery laughter; and at the sound of it the Moon-flower started, and stood erect, and a stir of delight seemed to take hold of its leaves. Again the laughter came, and the soft earth moved at the sound of it.

The Prince started up, and ran and fetched a spade, and struck it down under the loose soil of the mound. When he lifted up the earth, out sprang a tiny child like a lobe of quicksilver, laughing merrily with its first leap into the light. But even then its laughter changed into a cry; for out after it darted the Red Mole, with fury in its whiskers, and wrath flashing out of its eyes.

The quicksilver child sprang away, darting swiftly over the grass towards the margin of the pool. There lay the full Moon's image upon the clear stillness of the water; and the child leapt down the bank, and laughed as it sprang safely away. Then there followed a tiny splash; and the Prince, amid the rings upon the water's surface, saw, like a door of pearl, the Moon's face open and

close again. And the Red Mole went down into the earth gnashing its teeth for rage.

The Prince ran back to the Moon-flower, and found it bent forwards and trembling with fear. Then he drew its head towards his heart, and whispered "The Red Mole came, and the full Moon came, and the silver child jumped down into the water!" And at that the Flower lifted its head and began clapping its leaves for joy.

A month went by, and the green mound had disappeared from beneath the Moon-flower's roots; and still every night the Prince lay down under the shadow of its leaves; and the Flower bent over him, and laid its head against his face.

As he lay so, one night, and watched the full Moon travelling high overhead, he saw a shadow begin to cross over it; and he knew that it was the eclipse, which is the shadow of the Earth passing over the face of the Moon; then he rose softly, leaving the Moon-flower asleep, and went and stood by the brink of the pool.

Up in the Moon the silver child felt the shadow of the Earth fall upon the face of the Moon; and he came and touched the Earth's shadow with his lips, crying, "Open, open to me, for I am an Earth-child!" Then the Earth's shadow that was upon the Moon opened, and the silver child sprang through.

The Prince, watching the veiled image of the Moon's face in the water, saw the Earth's shadow open like a door, so that for an instant the brightness of the Moon shone through, and out sprang the quicksilver child, up to the surface of the pool.

He leapt laughing up the bank, and went running over the grass to where the Moon-flower was standing. He reached up his arms, and caught the Flower by the head.

"O mother, mother, mother!" he cried as he kissed it.

And at the touch of his lips the Moon-flower opened and changed, growing wondrously tall and fair; and the flower turned into a face, and the leaves disappeared, till it was the beautiful Princess Berenice herself, who stooped down and took the quicksilver child up into her arms.

She cried, fondling him, "Did they give you your name?"

And the child laŭghed. "They call me Gammelyn," he said.

The Prince caught them both together in his arms. "Come, come!" he shouted and laughed, "for yonder is the full Moon waiting for us!" And, lifting them up, he ran with them to the borders of the pool.

And the Red Mole came, and the full Moon came; and the Prince, and the Princess, and the silver child jumped down into the water.

Then the Prince laid his lips against the reflection of the Earth's shadow, crying, "Open, open to me, for I am a child of the Earth!" And the shadow opened like a door to let them pass through. Then they pressed their lips against the reflection of the Moon's face crying, "Open, open to us, for we are Moon-children!" And the Moon opened her face like a door of pearl, so that they sprang through together, and were safe.

And when the Moon drew its reflection out of the pool, they found themselves in the land of the Moon, in the silver chamber with the round window, in the palace of Princess Berenice's father.

Looking out through the window, down at the end of a long moonbeam they saw the Red Mole gnashing his whiskers for rage. Then the Prince took off his shoes, and threw them with all his might down the moonbeam at the Mole.

As the shoes fell, they went faster, and faster, and faster, till they came to earth ; and they struck the Mole so hard upon the head that he died.

Now as for Gammelyn and the shoes we may hear of them again elsewhere ; but as for the Prince and his beautiful Princess Berenice, the happiness in which they lived for the rest of their days is too great even to be told.

THE WHITE KING

MANY years ago there lived a Queen who could not keep count of the countries over which she ruled. Her wealth and her wonderful beauty made her an apple of discord to all the kings who lived round about her borders. For love of her they waged perpetual war upon one another, and every King who proved victorious made a gift to the Queen of the country of the one whom he had conquered, in the hopes of thereby strengthening his claim to her favour. Thus it came about that she could no longer keep count of the lands which had fallen under her rule; yet still of all her suitors she chose none.

Now at this time there was one King, and only one, who had not succeeded in losing his heart to the Queen's majesty, in spite of her wealth and power, and all her wonderful beauty. And so, during a long time, since his fancy was thus free, he was left in undisturbed peace and prosperity, while other kings fought out their jealous battles, and stole away each other's lands. And because his reign was so quiet and his country in such rest, his people for a pet-name and for their pride in him, named him the White King.

Now after a time the Queen took it as an insult that anyone should be so indifferent to the power of her charms, and she began to threaten him with war for this reason and for that, wishing thereby to cajole him into becoming her suitor. But the

White King saw through all the disguises with which she covered her meaning, and understood the arrogance of her claim; so one day he sent to her as a gift a statue of himself with his sword sheathed, and all his armour covered over with the cloak of peace. Round the base of it was written

> "When a heart in stone doth move,
> Then your lover I may prove;
> But until the marvel's done,
> Fruitlessly your wars are won."

The Queen looked once at the statue, and for a long time after never looked away; and when at last she did her heart had been taken captive. Then she looked at the words beneath, and the red flush that rose to her face was not gone when the last of her army passed out of the city gates to carry war into the country of the man who had dared thus to speak scorn of her.

For a whole year the White King fought with the forces she sent against him; but when all the other kings came to her aid, then, stronghold by stronghold, all his cities were taken, and his lands were laid waste and their villages burnt, and nothing but defeat and ruin remained.

Yet in the last battle, when his enemies thought to have him a safe prisoner, all of a sudden they found that the White King had disappeared.

Back came the Queen's armies in triumph with their allies, and the conquered territory was added as one more to the many that formed her realm. But the Queen sighed as she looked at the White King's statue, and her triumph grew bitter to her. Day

by day, as she looked at the calm marble face, her love for it increased, and she owned sadly to herself, "He whom I have conquered has conquered me!"

Of the lost King himself no tidings could be learned, though search was made far and wide. Minstrels came to the court, and sang of his great deeds in fighting against odds, but of his end they sang variously. Some sang that he lay buried beneath the thickest of the slain; others that from his last battle he had been carried by good fairies, and that after he had been healed of his wounds, he would return in a hundred years and recover his kingdom.

One minstrel came to stay at the court who sang of ruined homes and wasted fields, and a happy land laid desolate, and how its King wandered friendless and unknown through the world, hiding himself in disguise, sometimes in the cottages of the poor, and sometimes in the dwellings of the rich. But from no one could the Queen learn any news that satisfied her or gave hope that he would at last bend down his pride, and come and sue to her for forgiveness.

Wishing to have a hiding place for her grief, she caused the statue to be set up in a green glade in the most lonely part of the gardens; and there often she would go and gaze on the calm noble face (whose closed eyes seemed even now to disdain her love), and would wonder how long a queen's heart took to break.

But after a time she thought, "Though I may never win the love of the White King for my own, is there no way by which my passion can assuage itself, when by lifting my finger I can summon half fairyland to my aid?"

So she called to her the most powerful fairy she knew, and taking her into the green glade, began sighing and weeping in front of the White King's statue. "This," she said, "is the image of the only man on earth I can love! But the man himself is lost, gone I know not where; and my heart is breaking for grief! Give this statue a life and a heart, and teach it to love me, else soon I shall surely be dead!"

The Fairy said to her, "All the might of Fairyland could not do so much; but a little of it I can do; and if Fate is kind to you, Fate may bring the rest of it to pass."

"How much can you do?" asked the Queen.

"This only," said the Fairy, "but even that you must do for yourself. I can but show you the way. Stone is stone, and out of stone I cannot make a heart; but a heart may grow into it, and this is the way to compass it.

"You must find first a man who is loved, but does not love (for if he loves, the statue's heart when it wakes will turn from you); and him you must kill with your own hand, and take out his heart and bury it beneath the feet of the statue. Then I will work my charms, and gradually, as a flower draws its life out of the ground, so the statue will draw life out of the human heart buried below. And after a little time you will see it move, and in a little time more its senses will come, and it will be able to hear, and see, and speak. But full life will not come to it until it has learned to love. Then, so soon as it learns to love, it will become no longer stone, but a human being."

But the Queen said, "Supposing its love were to turn from me to another, where should I be then?"

"Surely," said the Fairy, "the secret will be your own, and the watching of its life as it grows will be yours. Your voice it will hear, your face it will see; whom, then, will it learn to love more than you?"

"Wait, then, till I have found the man," said the Queen, "and we will do this thing between us!"

She searched long among her court for some man whose heart was whole, but who was himself loved. Generally, however, she found it was all the other way. There was not a man at the court who was not in love, or did not think himself so; and if there were one who had no thought of love, he was too poor and mean for the love of any woman to be his.

But one day the Queen heard a minstrel in the palace courtyard singing and making merry against love. It was that same minstrel who sang only sad songs of the White King's lands laid waste and himself a wanderer: a fellow with a dark sunburnt face, and thick hair hanging over his eyes. And as he sang and rattled his jests at the courtiers who stood by to listen, the Queen noticed one of her waiting-women looking out of a small lattice, who, as she watched the singer's face, and listened to his words, had tears running fast down out of her eyes.

"Is this a case," thought the Queen, "of a man who is loved but who does not love?"

She sent for the minstrel, and said to him, when he stood bending his head before her, "Is this pretty scorn that you cast on love earnest or jest?"

"Nay," he answered, "I jest in good earnest; for to speak of love in earnest is to jest about it."

"So," said the Queen, "you are heart-whole?"

"Why," said the minstrel, "I doubt if a mouse could find its way in; and if I am heart-whole in your presence, I ought to be safe from all the world!"

"Now," thought the Queen, "if only my waiting-woman answers the test, here is the heart I will have out!"

Then she bade the minstrel follow her to where stood the White King's statue, bidding him sit down under it and sing her more of his rhymes about love.

So the minstrel crossed his legs in the long grass and sang. His song became bitter to the Queen's ears, for he took the words that were round the statue, and rhymed them and chimed them, and threw them laughing in the Queen's face. She hated him so that she could have poisoned him; but she remembered that his life was necessary for her experiment to reach its end. So she sent instead for a sleepy wine, which she gave him to drink, and presently his voice grew thick and his head dropped down upon his breast, and his legs slid out and brought him down level with the grass. When night came on she left him soundly sleeping with his head between the feet of the White King's statue.

Then she sent for the waiting-woman and said, "Go down to the White King's statue, and find for me my handkerchief which I have dropped there." But as the girl went, the Queen stole secretly after her, and watched her come to where the minstrel lay asleep.

And when the waiting-maid saw him lying so, with his face thrown back, she knelt down in the grass by his side, and putting her arms softly about him, kissed him upon the lips over and over again as though she could never come to an end; and her tears dropped down on to his face, and, as if her mind were gone mad for love of him, the Queen heard her sighing, "Oh, White King, my White King, my Beloved, whom I love, but who loves me not!"

As soon as the waiting-maid was gone, the Queen came softly to the place, and with a sharp knife she cut out the minstrel's heart and buried it at the base of the statue.

In the morning the minstrel was found lying dead with his heart gone; and when they washed the dead face and put back the hair that covered the eyes, they found that it was the White King himself.

That day, and for many days after, there were two women weeping in the palace: one was the Queen and the other was the waiting-woman. But the body of the White King they buried close by the statue in the green glade.

Now presently, when the first violence of her grief was over, the Queen came to look at the place; and, sure enough, the Fairy had been there with her spells. When the wind blew the statue swayed gently like a tree in the wind.

The Queen caused gates and barriers to be put up so that no one should enter the glade but herself; only Love found a way, and at night, when all the world was asleep, the waiting-woman crept through a loose pale in the barriers, and came to moan over the place where her lover had been slain.

All night she would lie with her arms round the feet of the White King's statue, and dream of the dead minstrel whom she had loved and known through all his disguise. And all night long her lips would murmur his name, and whisper over and over again the sad story of her love.

And presently, as the statue drew life from the heart buried beneath its feet, its ears were opened and it heard.

In the daytime the Queen would come and sit before it and whisper words of love, offering it all the gifts of riches and power that are in the hands of kings to give; but at night came the waiting-woman and offered it only love.

Out of the ground the Queen saw grow a small plant, that began to creep upwards and to wind itself round the base of the statue; and when she saw that its flower was the deadly nightshade, her heart trembled and her conscience made her afraid.

But the waiting-maid, when she saw it, picked the sad blossoms and made a crown for the statue's head as of pale amethyst and gold: for she said to herself, "Down below my dear lies dead, and the roots of this flower are in his hair."

One day as the Queen came into the glade, she heard the dead minstrel's voice, and her heart shook with terror as she saw the statue open its white lips and sing, and recognised the tune and the words as those which had made her heart feel so bitter against him; for she thought, "What if he knows that it is I who have slain him?"

Now that she saw that the stone had its five senses, and could see and speak and hear, she

pleaded to it all day out of the greatness of her grief and her love. But the statue never returned her a word.

At night, lying with her face bowed between the White King's statue's feet, the waiting-woman knew nothing of all this change; only the statue heard and saw and knew. And at last one day as her tears dropped on them, she felt the feet grow warm between her hands; and a voice over her head that she remembered and loved, said, "Little heart, why are you weeping so?"

In the morning the Queen came and found the statue gone. There on the pedestal was only the print of his feet, half covered by the deadly nightshade which had climbed up to his knees and fallen. There it lay heavy and half-withered, clasping the hollows where his feet had been.

The Queen knelt down and caught the bare stone pedestal in her arms. "Oh, Love," she cried, "have you left me? Oh, White King, my White King, have you betrayed me?" And as she clung there weeping, her lips touched the deadly nightshade; and the nightshade thrilled, and felt joy give new life down into its roots.

It reached up and laid its arms about the Queen, about her throat, and about her feet and about her waist. "Dearly, dearly we love each other," said the nightshade, "do we not?"

At night the courtiers came, and found only a dead Queen lying, and the statue gone.

But the White King had gone home to his own land to marry the waiting-woman.

THE PASSIONATE PUPPETS

WHEN the long days of summer began, Killian, the cow-herd, was able to lead his drove up into the hills, giving them the high pastures to range. Then from sunrise to sunset he was alone, except when, early each morning, Grendel and the other girls came up to carry down the milk to the villages.

All day long the cow-bells sounded in his ears, but still the time of his wedding was a long way off; it would be five years before he and Grendel could afford to set up a house and farm, with cows of their own.

The great stretch of world that lay out under him, like a broad map coloured blue and green, made him full of a restless longing to try his fortune Yonder he could pick out the towns with their spires and glittering roofs, and the overhead mists, that gave token of crowded life below. It was there that wealth could be got; and with wealth men married soon, and were at ease. Somewhere, he had heard, lived kings and queens, wearing rich robes and gold crowns on the top of their heart's desire. For kings and queens, he supposed, loved as did he and Grendel, regarding nothing else as much in the world besides.

So Killian, putting heart into his deft hands, set to work.

One evening Grendel came up from the valley, after her day's work, to have a look at her lover;

she had brought him some brown cakes and a bottle of wine. But Killian, who had caught sight of her eyes over the green rise at his feet, was hiding something behind his back.

"Whatever have you there?" she asked, as she saw chips, and tools, and bits of bright foil, lying scattered about the ground. Yet for three days he would show her nothing, only he said, "What I do is because we love each other so."

At the end of that time, he showed her what he had done. There she saw a little king and queen, about six inches high; he was in blue, and she in white; and they were both as dear as they were small. The king was partly like a cow-herd, having a crown over his broad-brimmed hat, with thick wooden shoes, and leather-bound legs; and the queen was like Grendel, with great long plaits past her waist, and a gold-worked bodice, such as Grendel had for Sunday wear. "Aye, aye," cried Grendel, "why, it is you and me!"

Then Killian showed her how the joints of the little puppets moved on delicate wires, and how four strings ran up, one from each limb, to be fastened to the player's fingers, so that he might make them act as though life were in them.

"I shall take these down with me to the valley," said Killian. "First I shall go about among the villages; then, when I can do better, I shall go to the towns. After that no doubt the kings and queens will hear of me, and will send for me to play before them, and I shall become rich. Then I shall come home and marry you."

Grendel thought her lover the most wonderful

man in the world, and it is the truth he was very clever; she kissed him a hundred times, and the little marionettes also. "Ah," she said, "now we shall not have to wait five years! in five months you will come back rich and famous, and we shall marry, and live happily."

How Killian had loved her while making his puppets, only she knew as well as he. Truly, he had put his heart into them, so that they were like living beings,—and so small that their very smallness made them a marvel. Being a lover, he had put inside each breast a little heart, and, for the luck of the thing, had christened them with a drop of his own blood, and a drop of Grendel's; so each heart had in it one little drop of blood. Now he was to go out, and try his fortune.

He found a lad to come and take his place and see after the cows; then he said good-bye to Grendel, and set off on a round of all the villages of the plain.

At every inn where he put up, he called the country folk together to the sound of his shepherd's bag-pipes, and showed them his play. It was only himself and Grendel, no story at all, merely lovers parting and meeting again, each believing the other dead, and in the end living happily to the sound of cow-bells, that showed how rich they were in herds.

And the villagers laughed and cried, and gave him pence, and a night's lodging, and food; so that presently he was able to make himself a little travelling-stage, and hire a piper to play dance-music for him. But it was always the one story

of himself and Grendel, and no other, though the two puppets wore crowns upon their heads.

The little marionettes had hearts. That was the beginning of things: they remembered nothing else. When their eyes had grown open to the fact, then for them life had begun. After that they lived like bee and blossom, only that the bee never flew away, and the honey remained in the blossom.

How this came to pass was a question they never asked; why they loved each other they did not know. If they had had to think of it they would have said, "It is because we cannot help it." And every day one same thing happened to them that they could not help, the most beautiful thing in life. It came to them by instinct, taking hold of them from head to feet and saying, "Love, love, love," in all sorts of wonderful ways.

Whenever this thing happened they began to move about softly, going to and fro, and round and round, dancing, and holding each other by the hand, putting their cheeks so close together that their eyelids brushed, and sometimes their little hearts that heaved. And all the while music from somewhere was giving a meaning to these things; and over and over again, "Love, love, love" was what it kept saying to them.

Their happiness was so great, that they would begin playing with it, pretending that it was all turned into grief. First he would kiss her from forehead to chin, and into the hollow of her little throat; and then all down each dear arm, even to

the finger-tips; and last of all her feet; and again last of all her lips, and again last of all her breast. And then he would go away, walking backwards most of the time, or if not, still turning round and round to take another look at her. Then when he was altogether out of sight, she would sit down and cry, though all the while he would be peeping at her from his hiding-place, to let her know that he was not really gone. Then she would lie down, and cry more, and at last leave off crying and stay almost still on a little bed, that seemed to come to her from nowhere, just when she was ready to fall on it. Then, at last, she would shut her eyes, and cover her face up very slowly with a sheet, and lie so still that he would grow quite frightened, and come running from his hiding-place, and lift the sheet, and look at her; then he would fall down as if his legs had been cut from under him; then he would get up and throw flowers over her, and at last catch her up and begin to carry her; and at that she would wake up all at once and kiss him, to a sound of bells.

They did not know why they did this; it was so beautiful they could not have thought of it for themselves, and yet it said everything of life that they wanted to say. For love was the beginning and the end of it; and always, as they came to the sad part, they had tender tremblings for fear the other should think the sorrow was real: he, lest she should think he had really gone away and left her, never to return; and she, lest he should believe that she always meant to lie so cruelly still, with a sheet over her eyes. Yet the kissings that

came after made the fearfulness almost the sweetest thing in their prayer-sayings to each other.

For to them this was a daily prayer, the most solemn thing in their lives; heart praying to heart, and hand reaching to hand; and from somewhere overhead gentle monitions as to what they must do next coming to them, so that they knew how to pray best, now by lifting a hand, or now by turning the head, or now by running fast with both feet. And all this beautiful worship of love their bodies learned to do more perfectly day by day; yet the little quaking of fear was still in the centre of it all.

Killian's fingers grew nimble; and yet he often wondered to see how true to life his puppets were, how they sighed, how they embraced and clung, as if their hearts were coming in two when the parting drew near. How lingeringly the little queen drew up the sheet over her face, when her lover did not return, and let it fall to cover her with a quiet sigh. Often he cried when she did that part, so like Grendel was it,—the tender waiting, and the last giving in! And then, how the little king shuddered as he drew the cloth from her face; and how he threw the flowers, as if there were not enough in the world to express his grief! And yet it was only a play, made by the twitching of the strings tied to his fingers, with love as the beginning and end of it.

Killian was getting quite rich in copper coin, so he sent some of it home to Grendel, that she might buy stock for the home that was so soon to be theirs. And presently he made bold to go into the towns,

where, instead of copper, he might gain silver. He built a bigger stage, and had more music to go to the dance; but still it was the story of himself and Grendel, with crowns upon their heads, and nothing more.

And now, indeed, people began to cry, "Here is a wonderful new actor! He has it all at the ends of his fingers! What a pity he has no better play in which to show himself off!" But Killian said, "It is the only play I know how to do."

Presently there came a sharp fellow to him, who said: "If you will go shares with me I will make your fortune. We have only to put our heads together, and the thing is done. I will write the plays for you, and you shall play them on the strings. What is wanted is a little more real life."

Killian was a simple fellow, who believed all the world to be wiser than himself. He was glad enough to meet with a clever fellow who could write plays for him. His partner wanted him to make new dresses for the marionettes, to suit their new parts; but to that Killian would not agree. So whatever they were they still wore their broad hats and crowns, and their wooden shoes, that still he might watch in his own mind himself and Grendel making their way to fortune and happiness.

The marionettes grew bewildered with their new taking; they did not understand the meaning of all the coarse things they had to do. So in the middle of a play, the little queen would fail now and then in her part, and move awkwardly, wondering what her lover meant when he sprawled to and fro, and seemed trying to find in the air more feet than he had upon the ground.

Yet the crowd found her bashful fear so irresistibly funny, that it roared again. Also, when the little cow-herd with the crown on his head, lifted his hand or foot towards his partner, and then shrank trembling away, it roared yet more at the poltroon manner of the thing.

Killian's partner said, "You alter all my plays, but the way you do them is something to marvel at. Only, why do you always bring them round again to that silly lovers' ending?"

"I cannot help it," said Killian; "often now, with these new plays, I can't get the strings to work properly. I think the poor puppets are getting worn out."

His partner began examining the puppets, and watching how Killian played them, with more attention; and presently he knew that there was more in it than met the eye. "It is the puppets who are the marvel, not the man," he said to himself. "I could work them better myself, if I had practice."

Soon after this he proposed that they should set off for another town; it was the chief town of all, where they hoped at last to be allowed to show their plays to the queen herself. "It must be a real play this time," said the partner, "a tragedy; but it wants a third person. You must make another puppet, while I write the play!"

So Killian set to work. But he had no love for the third puppet, which was neither himself nor Grendel, and he put no heart inside it, and no little drop of blood. So the new marionette was but limbs, and a head drawn on wires.

"Soon," thought Killian, "I shall be rich enough

to go home and marry Grendel. Then I will throw this stupid third one away; but the other two we will always keep close to the niche with the statue of Our Lady, to help to make us thankful for the good things God gives us in this world."

It was beautiful late spring weather when he and his companion set out for the capital. On the way Killian's partner told him the play that would have to be played before the queen, and said, "In case three should be too much for you to manage, you had better teach me also to handle the strings." So Killian began to teach him, with the two little marionettes alone, the first play which he had brought down with him from the mountains,— that being the easiest of all to learn, and the one he loved best to teach.

The partner was surprised to find how wonderfully the puppets followed the leading-strings; in spite of his clumsiness the story acted itself to perfection.

Simple-hearted Killian was charmed. "Ah! you clever townsman," said he, "see how at first trial you equal poor me, who have been at it for months! It had better be you, after all, to do the play when it is called for at the court." And this Killian proposed truly out of pure modesty, but also because he did not like the play his partner had made for him. "It is too cruel a one!" he said. "After they have played it together so long, I feel as if my two puppets can do nothing else so well as love each other, and live happily."

"Ah, but," said his partner, "the queen would find that very dull!" Killian could not see why;

but he believed that the townsman was wiser than himself, and gave in. All he wanted now was to get money enough to run back home with, and throw himself into his dear Grendel's arms for life.

So they journeyed on, and at last, one day, they came in sight of the capital. But it had been such a long way to come that when they reached the gates they found them shut.

The night was warm, and a high moon was overhead. "Come," said Killian, "and let us lie down in one of these orchards that are outside the walls!" So they left the high road, and went and lay down.

First they ate some food that they carried with them. Then Killian opened the case in which lay the two marionettes, and looked them over to see that they were in working order. His partner took up the odd number, and began practising it; but Killian's attention all went to the little king-cowherd and his queen.

He fondled them gently with his hands, and as he looked at them his heart went up into the mountains to pray for his dear Grendel.

Presently he began dreaming to himself like Jacob, only his dream was just of the simple things of earth. Down the great green uplands came troops of white cattle; but to him they seemed to be bridesmaids coming to Grendel's wedding day, and the ringing of the cow-bells was as sweet to him as the songs of angels. Before he was fast asleep the two marionettes had slipped off his knee and lay in the deep grass looking up at the sky.

They had never seen so beautiful a sight before,

for never had they spent a night in the sweet open air till now. Over their heads swung dusky clusters of blossom, that would look white by day; and over them the moon went kissing its way from star to star.

Now and then single blossoms dropped as if they had something to say to the little cow-herd and his queen, lying there in the cool grass.

But the marionettes said nothing; their hearts were very full; now, at last, they found their old happiness return to them. Their prayers, that they used to say to each other so tenderly, had been going wrong for quite a long time; sudden starts and tremblings of fear had taken hold of their light-hearted deceptions of each other; and every day things had been going worse. But now they felt like entering upon a long rest.

As they lay, their hands met together. The little cow-herd could count her fingers across the palm of his hand, and never once did she pretend to be drawing them away. How good it all seemed!

Close by them the odd man was strutting in stiff, ungainly attitudes, cricking his neck and elbows, and tossing up his toes. How foolish he seemed to them in their innocent wisdom! They knew he was nothing to them, for he had no heart; he was nothing but a trick on springs. Yet they wished he would go away, and give them room to be alone, while the moon was making a white dream over their lives.

The partner grumbled to himself at the awkward ways of the new puppet. Instead of obeying, it kicked at the leading strings, and did everything like

a stick, all angles and corners. Presently he put it back into its box; and then he saw the little king and queen lying together on the damp grass. He picked them up, growling at Killian as a simpleton, for leaving them there to get rusty with the dew. Then he put them also away, and curled himself up to dream about the success of his play on the morrow.

Quite early in the morning he and Killian went into the city, and set up their stage in a corner of the market-place. The wonderful acting of the little king and queen, compared with the ungainly hobblings and jerkings of the odd man, threw the townspeople into ecstasies of laughter. They declared they had never seen so funny a sight in their lives as the beautiful nervous acting of the pair, side by side with the stiff-jointed awkwardness of the other.

Presently, sure enough, the queen heard tell of this new form of entertainment, and sent word for the mummers to appear at the palace.

Killian said to his partner: "There is something the matter with the puppets to-day; they want careful handling. I am glad we settled that you are to do the new play; for, before the queen and her great ladies, I am likely to lose my head."

All the court was gathered together to watch the puppet-play, while behind the scenes the partner took all the leading strings into his own hands.

The two marionettes opened their eyes, and saw daylight; they began moving to and fro softly; every now and then they put their faces together

and kissed. The stupid odd man seemed to have gone; they were so glad to be left alone.

Soon the little king lay down, pretending to be tired, but it was only that he might put his head in the queen's lap. She bent over him, and laid her fingers on his eyes, seeming to say, "Go to sleep, then! I will shut your eyes for you." How pretty it was of her!

Then she covered his face over with her handkerchief; and all at once in came the odd man, walking on the points of his toes. The little king, now that the handkerchief was over his face, opened his eyes, and looked through it, to see what his dear queen would be doing now. The odd man had his arms round her neck, and was kissing her, and the queen looked as if she were going to kiss him back; but all at once she had pushed away the odd man so hard that he fell down with his heels in the air; and then she snatched the handkerchief from the king's face, and began trembling, and kissing him.

The whole of the court shouted, first with laughter at the odd man's fall, and then with admiration at the wonderful acting of the little queen.

Behind the scenes the partner began grumbling to Killian: "They are going all wrong! It's all your doing, leaving them to lie in the damp grass last night!"

But still the whole court shouted and applauded. So the play went on; and now, more and more, the showman had cause to grumble. Whenever he came to a part where the play required that the

queen should turn from her own cow-herd to the ugly odd man, everything went wrong. "Very well," thought he at last, "she may be as innocent as Desdemona but it will all come to the same at the last!"

And so, still more, as the play went on, the little marionettes trembled and shook with fear. They wished the silly odd man would go away, and not come interrupting their prayers; and all the while they loved each other so! No idea of jealousy ever entered the little king's head; and as for the queen, if the odd man came and put his arms round her neck and kissed her, could she help it? All she could do was to run and put her arms round her own lover when he reappeared; and how the court shouted and applauded, when she went so quick from one to the other.

At last the final act was begun; the king came running in with a sword in his hand, why, he did not know, until he saw his poor little queen struggling in the arms of the odd man. "Ah," thought he, "it is to drive him away! Then we shall be by ourselves again, and happy."

No one ever fought so wonderfully on a stage before as the little cow-herd. All the court started to their feet, shouting; and still, while they shouted, they laughed to see the impossible odd man scooping about with his sword, and jerking head over heels, and high up into the air, to get away from the little king's sword-play. The partner had to keep snatching him up out of harm's way, for fear of a wrong ending. Then, suddenly he let him come down with a jump on the little

king's head. And at that the king fell back upon the ground, and felt a sharp pain go through his heart.

The odd man drew out his sword and laughed; on the end of it was a tiny drop of blood. The poor little queen ran up, and bent down to look in her lover's face, to know if he were really hurt. And then a terrible thing happened.

Three times the little king raised his sword and pointed it at her heart, and dropped it again. And all the time the partner was tugging at the strings, and swearing by all the worst things he knew.

The little king felt himself growing weak; he was very frightened. He felt as if he were going away altogether, and leaving her to think he did not love her any more. And still his arm went up and down, pointing the sword at her heart.

The showman tugged angrily; then there was the sound of a wire that snapped—the king had thrown away his sword.

He reached up his two arms, and laid them fast round the queen's neck. "Now at last she knows that I have not left off loving her." He felt her drawing herself away, he held her more and more tightly to his breast; and now her little face lay close against his. Nothing can take her away from him now!

The showman pulled violently with all his might, to get her away; there was a snapping of strings, and then—the queen reached out two weak little hands, and laid them under her lover's head.

They lay quite still, quite still for a long time, and never moved. "The play is over!" said the

showman, disgusted and angry at the wreck of his plot.

Suddenly the whole stage became showered with gold; the great queen and all her court threw out showers of it like rain. It fell all over the two marionettes, covering them where they lay, just as the babes in the wood when they died were covered over with leaves.

Killian dropped his head on to the boards of the little stage, and sobbed. The partner let down the curtain, and began gathering up the gold.

And still, from without, the queen and her court clapped, and cried their applause; and still within lay Killian with his head upon the stage, sobbing for the two little marionettes, lying still with all the springs and strings of their bodies quite broken. Inside, though he could not see them, their hearts were broken also. "Now," he thought, "I must go back to Grendel, or I too shall die!"

Later, in the middle of the night, the partner went away, carrying with him all the gold that the little marionettes had earned by their deaths. And these, indeed, he left, seeing that they were useless any more. But to Killian, when he woke the next morning, they were the only things left him in the world, to take back to Grendel.

He took them just as they were, locked in each other's arms, and went back all the long way to Grendel, up into the hills of his home, as poor in money as when he first started.

But Grendel saw that he had come back rich; for his face was grown tender and wise. And for five years they waited very patiently together, till

by cow-keeping he had earned enough for them to keep some cows of their own, and to live in married happiness.

The little marionettes they put on a shelf, beneath the cross, and the statue of our Lady; and there, locked in each other's arms, those two disciples and martyrs of love lie at peace, feeling no pain any more in their broken hearts.

KNOONIE IN THE SLEEPING PALACE

JUST when the palace fell into its deep sleep, the porter's son had run out to follow a swarm of bees which had flown over the fish-ponds into the woods lying outside the royal demesne. In the very minute after he had climbed the wood-pales, to the time when the shifty swarm came swinging its long bright tangle for home, calling on him to retrace his pursuit, sleep had clapped down like a great eyelid over the whole palace.

Knoonie made a clear leap over the palings into the royal clover; and then felt something hurting his heart, he could not know what or why, very strange, very frightening; it was like waking up all alone in the middle of a dark night, and feeling that something was standing quite still in the silence before him—quite still, because he himself had moved. He took one step forward, and at that sprang aside as if a snake were under him: his foot had made no sound in the clover! Then, thinking his ears must have deceived him, he tried once more. Ah! now it was so frightful that his courage went utterly: "Help, help!" he cried with all the force of his lungs: but his voice gave no sound. The dead silence that weighed on his struggles to cry, drove him wild with terror.

He set off running as if Death were after him: running like a blind thing; and knew nothing more till he fell half-stunned and bleeding into the gateway of the palace-courtyard.

He sprang, and tapped with his hand on the porter's wicket. "Father, dear father, open quick!" he cried. But the words fell mute, and the wicket did not open. Then he began beating with his fists on the bronze panels, and, seizing hold of the knocker, battered for dear life. For dear life! But dear reason almost died in the attempt. The great bronze knocker beat without making a sound. He stopped his ears with his fingers to get rid of the stillness which was so terrible: and then at last he began to think that while in the wood he must have gone stone-deaf. But he was frightened; though he was deaf, others surely should hear him: again he beat and beat upon the knocker, throwing his whole weight upon it, and cried with the tears running down his face for his father to come to him.

Surely somebody must come. No, all was quite still as well as silent: nothing moved: everywhere it was the same. There was a sentry on guard over the gate: Knoonie could see his helmet and the top of his halbert shining in the sun. He cried to him to come down and let him in; but the man stood so still that he began to think he must truly have lost the power of speech as well as of hearing. He stooped down, and taking up a stone, threw it at the soldier to make him turn round; moving away from the wall so as to get a better aim, he was able to see more of him. The sentry stood very strangely; he must be asleep or sun-struck, for a small green paroquet had come and perched on his shoulder.

The fifth stone Knoonie threw (for fear had made his hand tremble) hit the soldier on the head; and yet he did not wake up, and the strange little

paroquet remained as if stuffed and glued to its perch.

Then Knoonie, casting his eyes all round for anything to help, saw a new sight. All down the broad avenues of the park a movement was taking place from the earth upwards : it came nearer and nearer : it was like a green army on the march : it waved long prickly spears and many-pointed crests, and sent green things like lizards swarming into the high trees that stood in its way. Up and up, closer and higher to the very gates of the palace it came—a wall of thistles, magic in strength and stature, over-ranked by beetling heads of hemlock, and under-run by long snakey loops of bramble, that writhed in and out of the earth like huge worms.

" I must be dreaming ! " thought Knoonie for a way out of his distress. " It's all one horrid dream which will come to an end just as the worst thing happens." But the giant thistles came crowding close, reaching hungry hands at him. He caught hold of the knocker, and dragging himself up was able in his terror to force open the wicket, and work his small body through, just as the first thistle caught him by the leg. He escaped shoeless and with all his hose torn into ribands from the knee. Inside he came upon his father, sitting in his accustomed niche, keys in hand, sitting quite still with head bent and closed eyes.

The child began to tremble and cry ; he forgot any longer to think it was a dream ; a remembrance like the touch of dead lips chilled his heart : the remembrance that while his father had been sitting there almost within reach of his hand, he, Knoonie,

had cried and beaten with all his force upon the door, and had not been heard. He threw his arms round his father's neck, and clinging close to the deaf face he loved: "Father, father," he cried, "wake!" But his words had no sound, and the porter made no sound or stir.

Dead, dead! Knoonie threw up his hands, and trying vainly to utter one call for help, darted into the palace.

After a long time, he came out again with a white face, looking dazed into the sunlight: what was it he had seen in there? Beautiful lords and ladies, still as death, smiling and bending over golden plates and half-tasted wine; serving men who stood upright and still as death, carrying dishes and tilting out the wine into great tankards; and, over all, the yellow sunlight streaming in licked the dead faces as a beast licks carrion.

He ran tottering over the marble pavement, as fast as fear would send him; to get away out of the palace and fetch help for all these dead or dying people: for there must still be somebody left somewhere. But when he came to the porter's lodge, there was a sight in the wicket that stopped him: the small square aperture was bulged through by thistle and bramble, in the midst of which his little shoe hung trussed and skewered; the hard grasp of the thistles had bent it out of shape, and the thorns of the bramble had cut into the leather like the steel teeth of a trap. Looking through, he could see nothing but one dense forest of thistles, made the more impassable by a thick mesh of creepers that clung about their stems. He climbed up on to the walls:

everywhere was the same; those death's heads of hemlock had grown higher than the trees of the park, and threw their shadows over the whole palace.

Slowly, the meaning of the horror which had first been so impossible for his mind to take in grew clear to his imagination. The sleeping palace, that whispered tale of his childhood, was embodied before him; and of all those who had heard it told, and laughed it lightly away because every day brought sameness of life to each sense, he alone was left awake to drink the full cup of this sleep of doom, he alone, amid others unconscious of their arrested life, with all the ways of knowledge closed from him by an overwhelming silence, he and he only must live and move, and endure this living tomb, till the Prince Rescuer should come, of whom the same tale gave promise. The great palace where he had been such a little thing at everybody's beck and call, one for the grooms to tease, and for maids and serving-men to harry, was his own possession now, to do in what he would; but no joy came to him with this growing sense of a strange liberty. He went from place to place, tiptoeing at first, hardly daring to enter those grand chambers where the king and his great lords were sitting in state; but the lords-in-waiting stood making way for him with closed eyes; and he might see and touch and taste whatever he chose.

He went and stood behind great ladies, and stroked their shining hair, and touched their white wondrous throats, and the strong hands of the knights, the King's even, with its gold signet ring; but there was no joy in any of these things. And when hunger came on him he put out his hand and helped himself

from the King's plate : yet though he had tasted no such delicacies in his life before, they gave him no pleasure now. He looked at all the beautiful ladies with their sweet-smiling lips, and remembered how he had thought that to be kissed by them would be almost death, so great must be the delight. Now he climbed up to the sweetest of them all, and tried to imagine her as the mother he had never known ; yet when he kissed, and saw how the lips went smiling on, it was such bitterness that the tears burst from his eyes, and fell into the velvet lap of her dress. He caught up a napkin, " For when she wakes up she will see what a mess I have made and be angry," he thought : then he remembered the hundred years, and cried still more.

At last, when it began to get dark, weary with sorrow, and drawn thither by a growing fear of his loneliness, he went back to the gate, and there, kissing him, lay down with his head on his father's knee, and clinging to the hand that had hold of the keys of his prison, wept himself to sleep. Ah ! how happy would he be if sleep would join his lot to theirs, and his eyes never open again till the whole day of deliverance was come. Alas ! that the bees should have led him beyond reach of the charm which would have brought sleep, and only back to be enclosed in the impenetrable embrace of that thorny fastness.

The next day's sun shone down and opened Knoonie's eyes ; and he rose up into the life-long silence that encompassed him ; and, kissing his father's face, went forth into the joyless splendours of his prison-house.

This day he climbed all the towers, and strained his eyes for a glimpse of the great unsleeping world beyond. But high and far the forest of thorns had stretched itself; and he could only see here and there the blue of the most distant hills through gaps of thicket.

Then he went down, and sought out all his old acquaintances, the stable-boys who played with him, the grooms who bullied, and the maids who teased. He came face to face with the terrible head-cook, who had so many times threatened to beat him to a jelly; now Knoonie could have boxed the tyrant's head off, and no hand would be there to stay him; but he only stood and looked at the big grim face and the closed eyes, and longed hungrily for a blow from that coarse red fist.

He went on to the stables; and now who was there to forbid him his heart's desire to climb on to the back of the King's great charger, who stood sleeping with beautifully arched neck: yet when he had clambered his way up by the manger, it was no pride to him to be there: he only bowed his face down into the black mane and wept.

That same day he found the Princess sleeping in her chamber; oh! so beautiful she was with her little white hand laid on the spinning-wheel, a small prick of scarlet showing on the delicate skin. So beautiful she was, he dared not kiss her yet, for he did not know that anyone who could win entrance into the sleeping palace, could by kissing the Princess break the charm and gain her for his bride. Already more than one brave knight had entered that vast forest of thorns and thrown away his life in striving

to get to those lips which were Knoonie's for a little stooping. But he was a child and he did not understand.

The days went by, the weeks went by, and the child fell in with ever deepening sadness to the loneliness of his environment. His wistful face grew beautiful and pure in that still air, and the picture of courtly life that encircled his lent him an unconscious grace. Yet he stayed humble and sad, and every night, leaving beds of down and pillows of lace untouched, went back to kiss his father's face and lie with his head on his knee. As for food, that great palace held stores which would suffice him through many lives; and during the magic sleep nothing changed or decayed: even the milk stayed fresh through the many years to come; a hundred shining pails of it standing in the king's dairy.

The weeks, the months, even the years went by; but the child forgot the passing of time; and the less and less of a child, retained the child's heart still, lonely and sad; with a child's will and brain, with the memory of its childish prattle dying away, and no words or thoughts of a growing man to take its place; and amid that sleep of dreamless men, where even the thought of evil did not enter, his heart was left to him, gentle, simple, and pure.

Every night at his father's knee Knoonie knelt and said his evening prayer, and slept well, with the porter's hand in his. Years made his body fair and of a slender strength, and through the deep silence he grew tall. And he would go and look at the sweet-faced women, and wonder why he sighed, and why it was so sad to kiss their lips that smiled and

yet cared nothing—so sad that as years went on he left off from that which seemed to put a double silence on his life, the pain being too keen for his heart. And then he would go and look at the Princess whose lips he had never kissed: and that seemed the saddest thing of all.

Still years went on, and his mild mute life bore him very slowly on to age: and still night by night, a young man once, and then a man in his full prime, and then a man with grey hair showing on his head, and then a man beginning to bend down with age, went and said his childish prayer, and kissed his father's face, and slept with his head against his father's knee.

Very gently had life cradled him to age when a hundred years came round: he had lost all knowledge or thought of speech, save that one form of daily use, and his silver-grey face was a reflection of the spirit that brooded over the sleeping palace.

The great day came when all the palace clocks, and the sounds of speech and laughter woke back to life. The thorns and thistles had disappeared, dropping a child's shoe for luck over the palace threshold: the Prince had come and broken the spell. The cook was screaming that a hundred cats had been at the cream.

In a far-off corner of the palace Knoonie heard, and knew what these sounds meant, and his heart trembled for joy: but it was so very terrible! To him the pain, the bewilderment, the multitude of sights and sounds made this renewed life an agony past knowing; he was so giddy he could only creep hand over hand along the wall towards the gate where

his father sat. Now his one thought was to see his father.

As he came under the archway, the porter took him by the shoulder roughly, and turned him out of doors. "We want no naked old mendicants here."

Knoonie found no words to say; he just walked on and on, a beautiful bowed down old man, bespoken of none, until one night he knocked at a doorway in fairyland, and there with me found contentment and a home.

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